MDK • Magic: The Gathering
Air Warrior II • G-NOME

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PC GAMES

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SPECIAL DOUBLE ISSUE

UNREAL
THE UNTOLD STORY

27 NET-ONLY GAMES

GUIDED TOUR

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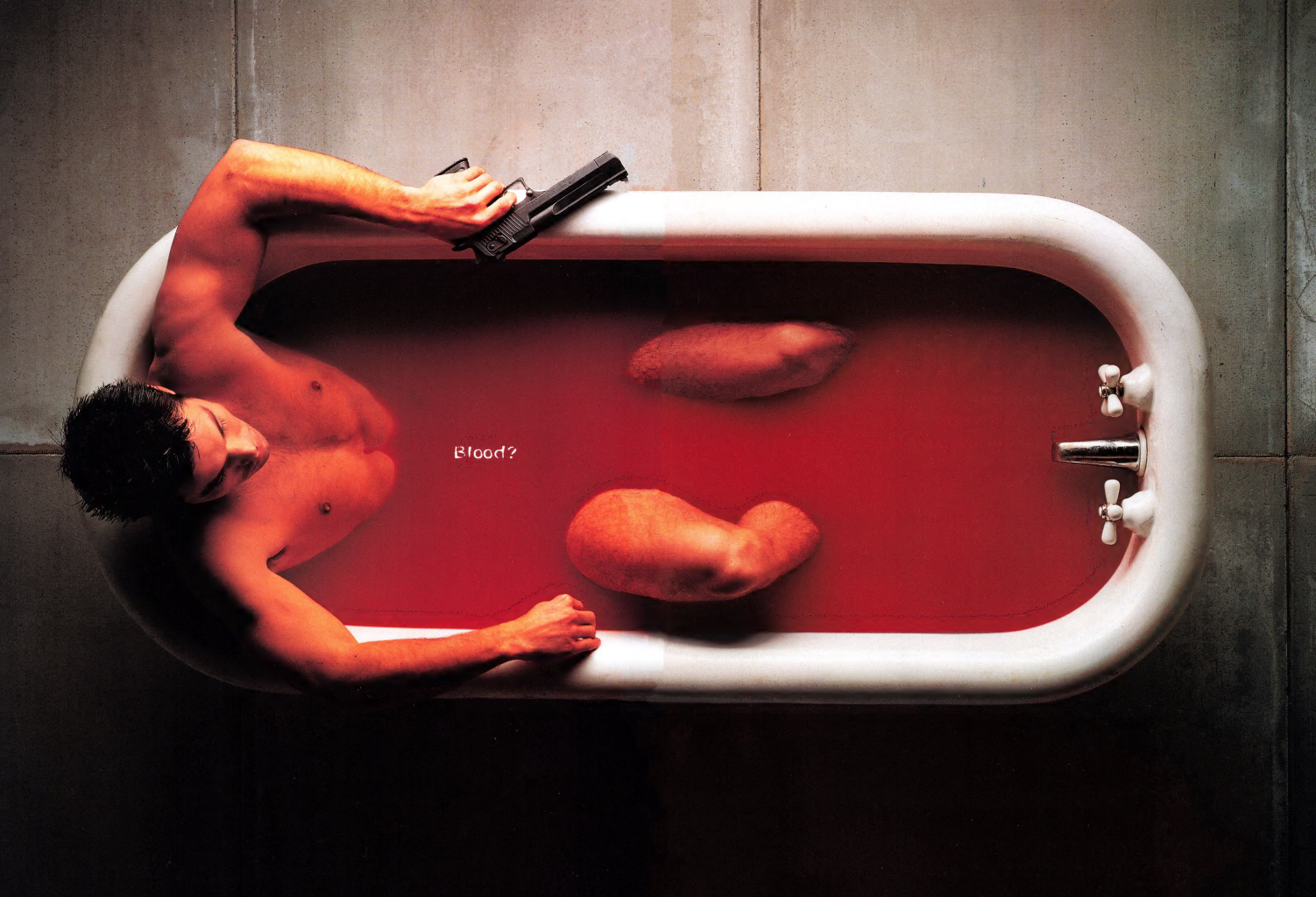
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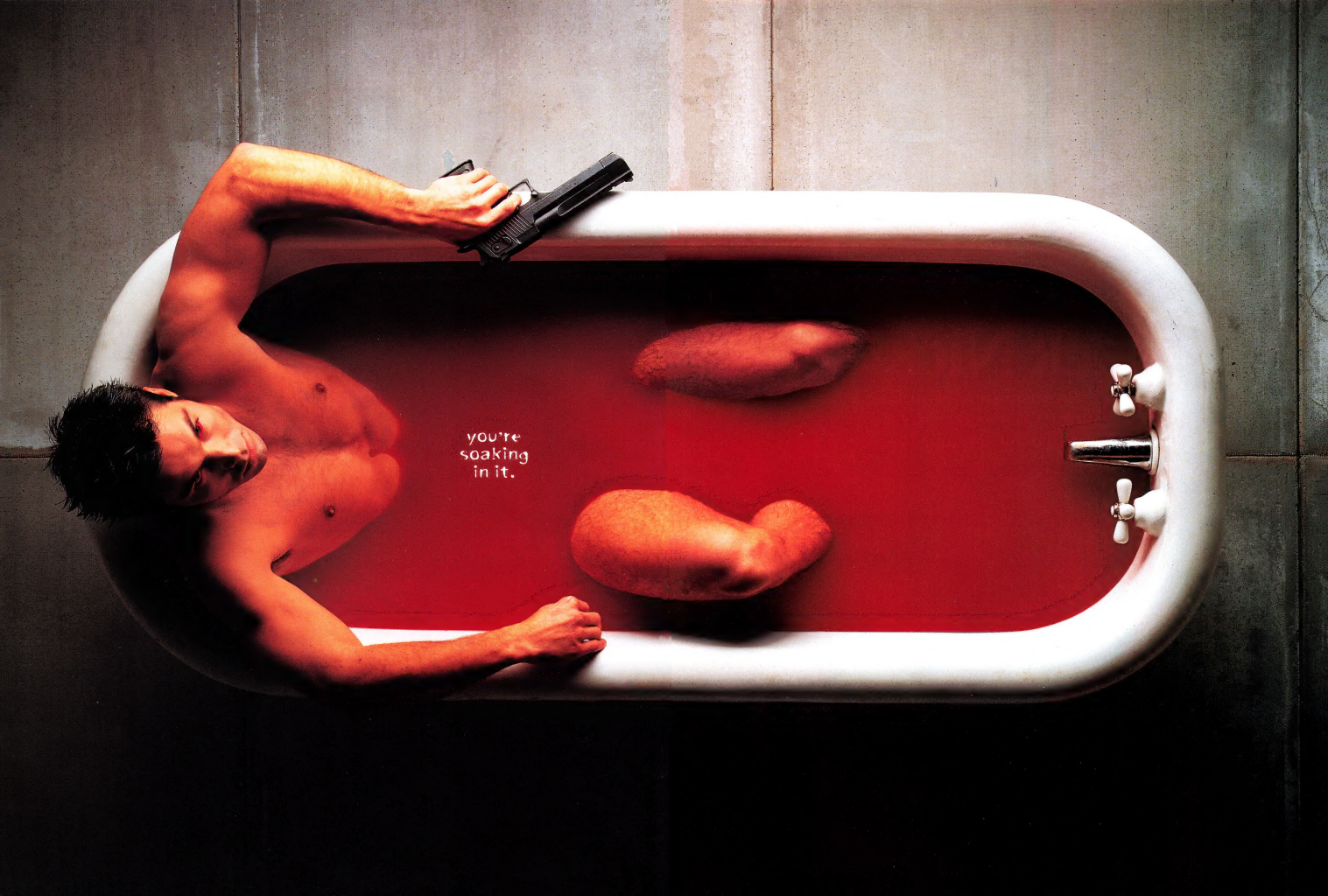
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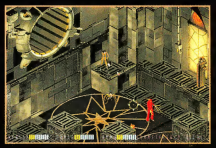

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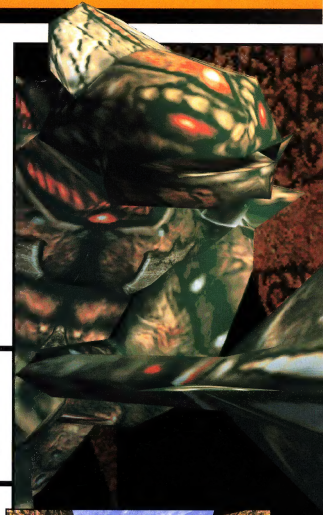

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72 Unreal
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Does Quake finally have a game to fear? Maybe. Epic MegaGames is readying Unreal, and we think it's going to be on every hardcore gamer's hard drive. To see why, read our exclusive report.

Cover image by David "Motornerve" Carter

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EDITOR'S NOTE

STEVE KLETT

First-Person Fantasies

Labels are used much too liberally these days—agreed. This is particularly true with the term "killer" used to describe software, as in "killer app" or "[blank] killer." There is perhaps no worse offender than the games industry in this regard.

Knowing this, we are nevertheless going to use the term "Quake killer" in reference to Epic MegaGames' upcoming Unreal, which *PC Games* proudly features in this issue. This truly impressive title continues to astound us each time we see it. The shareware's due out next month, so you'll be able to judge our use, or misuse, of the killer label soon enough. We're pretty confident that you're going to like it.

Jedi Knight may be out by the time you read this, and you may be saying, "Wait a minute, Jedi's the first true Quake killer." Perhaps a case could be made for it. However, Unreal is more similar to Quake in its theme, overall look, feel, atmosphere, and, of course, gore—and thus can be compared more directly. Regardless of whether you agree with our assessment, at least gamers aren't going to have to wait as long for competition to Quake as they did with Doom. In this gamer's humble opinion, no true Doom killer arrived until Duke Nukem 3D—some three years later.

So sit back and get ready for a barrage of the finest first-person action titles ever. They're coming in flavors to suit all tastes: Unreal should be right up Quake fans' alley; Blood (check out the shareware on this month's CD) should be perfect for those who think there's not enough gore in today's games; Shadow Warrior should give Dukers a fix; and Jedi's there for *Star Wars* fans and those who enjoy a good story. Best of all, you'll be able to play most of these games online, so you can settle your differences over which one is the best in a death-match the world over.

Fortunately, *PC Games* is well aware there is more to the gaming universe than first-person action games. Just check out Assistant Editor Daniel Morris' Guided Tour of Twinsen's Odyssey on page 64. You won't find any blood or gore in this game; just wonderful art and good, old-fashioned, wholesome fun.

And as always, *PC Games* is on top of the online-gaming scene. This month we bring you a rundown of 27 different games you can play online—many of them free, and most of them without to go out and buy a CD first; check out "No CD Required" on page 48. Then make sure to swing by *PC Games*' ongoing online and multiplayer coverage on Battlezone at **www.pcgames.com**.

Steve Klett
Editor
sklett@pcgames.com

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GT Interactive Software

PC GAMES.EXE

25 HOT DEMOS

Demo of the Month
MDK (Playmates)

Exclusive
Dragon Dice (Interplay)

Games
War Inc. (Interactive Magic)
Blood (GT Interactive)
Flying Corps (Empire)
Enemy Nations (Head Games)
KKND (EA)
Unreal—2 movies (Epic)
Test Drive: Off-Road (Accolade)
Scarab (EA)
TigerShark (GT Interactive)
FPS: Football Pro '97 (Sierra)
Helicops (7th Level)
Settlers II Gold Edition (Blue Byte)
Treasure Island (Carrsoft)
Quiver (ADvertainment)
Chasm (Megamedia)
Crush Deluxe! (Megamedia)

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TEN:
- Deadlock Shareware
- Quake Shareware
- Quake Enabler
- C&C: Red Alert Enabler

EarthLink:
- Air Warrior
- BattleTech Network
- Casino Poker
- Harpoon Online

Mplayer:
- Big Red Racing Enabler
- Command and Conquer Enabler
- C&C: Red Alert Enabler
- Quake Enabler

Ladies and gentlemen, it is our proud honor this issue to unveil for you a brand-spanking-new CD-ROM interface that's going to make access to all those hot new demos fast, painless, and incredibly easy. No messing around, no screens to scroll through, no hindrances in the way of getting to the great demo line-up. It's that simple.

PLEASE NOTE: We strongly recommend that the first time you run the interface, you go to My Computer and right-click over the *PC Games* icon that represents the CD in the drive. Select Open. In the root directory of the CD is a setup.exe file. Double-click on this file to run the setup routine, which installs files required to run the interface that may not currently be on your PC.

Getting Started

Win 95
Simply place the CD in your disc drive and the interface will burst into life with the Autorun function.

Win 3.1
Insert the CD in your disc drive. In Program Manager, select the File menu and then Run. In the command-line box, type d:\pcgames.exe (where "d" is the letter of your disc drive).

This is where you'll find all the games featured on this issue's CD. Click on any of them to highlight the relevant information about a game.

Get up and running on the online services in a flash. Click on any of these services to run the setup routines instantly. You'll be online and playing as quickly and easily as possible.

Once you've selected a demo from the list and read the information in the instruction box, you're ready to install or play. One click on this button runs the install or setup routine for your selected demo. And there you have it—straight to the games.

A quick view of the type of game highlighted from the Demos list.

You really want to leave? Click here to exit from the interface.

Find out a couple of the forthcoming highlights on next issue's CD and in the magazine with a quick click here.

PCGames.com is one of the most happening gaming Web sites out there. Click on this button, and you'll be prompted to locate the executable file that runs your Web browser (it's likely to be iexplore.exe or netscape.exe). Once you've done that, this information is stored so that in the future, you're just one click away from the latest news, reviews, previews, and information.

Once you've selected a game from the Demos list, information about that game, installation advice (which may be pretty important, so please take a moment to read it), and some gameplay hints appear in this box.

Due to circumstances way beyond our control, the Krazy Ivan, Minigolf, and Starfleet Academy demos could not be included on this issue's CD-ROM. We apologize for the inconvenience and assure you that the person responsible has been fired—again.

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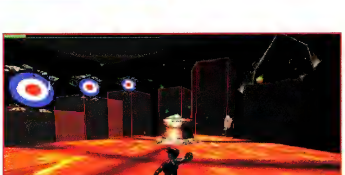
DEMO OF THE MONTH
MDK

Playmates Interactive Entertainment

We brought you the first available demo on last month's PC Games.EXE; now check out the advances made as a result of player feedback. For starters, the control options have been increased and some of the bugs in that early release are fixed. If you want a taste of how our Game of the Month looks and plays, head straight for MDK.



Highlights

Dragon Dice

Dragon Dice

PC Games.EXE proudly features the first look anywhere of a fully playable version of Interplay's upcoming Dragon Dice. The tabletop dice game proved a big hit with gamers and collectors alike, spawning this innovative fantasy action, adventure and strategy game. The translation to the PC adds plenty of flair and style to the Dungeons & Dragons setting in which the battles are fought.

Flying Corps

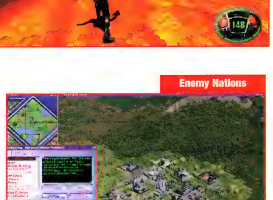
Try out last issue's Game of the Month in this great, fully playable demo.

Unreal

Although the game's not quite playable yet, we've got two movies showing the movement through the Unreal game environment. So, when the cover feature has piqued your interest sufficiently, check out these clips for an idea of what's in store from Epic MegaGames.

Enemy Nations

Distributed by Head Games Publishing, this Windward Studios–developed real-time strategy game was added to the PC Games A-List with a glowing review last issue. Check it out for yourself in this playable demo.



Enemy Nations

In Case of Emergency

The all-new interface is incredibly easy to navigate, and you shouldn't encounter any problems accessing the demos. If you do experience difficulties, please read the instructions in the information box carefully. Should the interface fail to run at all, make sure that you've run the setup.exe file located in the root directory of the CD.

If that still fails to resolve your problems, we can accept technical support e-mails about problems relating to the interface (not the demos themselves, which are the responsibility of the respective publishers). Direct these queries to ctou@pcgames.com.

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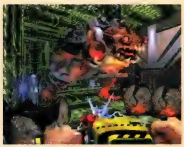

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Rock Out on Battlezone!

PC Games' online guide to multiplayer and online gaming is up and smoking! Here's where you'll find the latest info on online services, network games, and tournaments, plus the Player of the Month and Game of the Month! Set your browser to **www.pcgames.com/batttlezone** for the finest online/MPG experience!

Blood!

The shareware is out, and we've got details on the whole shebang for this highly anticipated Build-engine game. Get all the gory details (and we do mean gory) on PC Games Online.

Blood

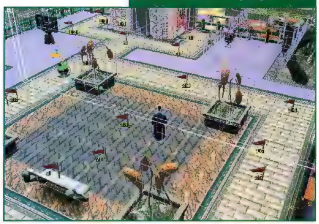
Live from The Computer Game Developer's Conference!

Every year, the people who make the games you love hook up to talk about the game industry and what you can expect in the coming year. *PC Games* will be all over this one, so check out our Web site on April 25 and again on April 28–29 for daily updates.

Exclusive Web-Only Reviews!

As always, we tell you about more games than any magazine or Web site out there! Go to PC Games Online for Web-exclusive looks at TigerShark, NBA Hang Time, Banzai Bug, CyberDome, and more!

Twinsen's Odyssey



The Making of Twinsen's Odyssey!

This striking graphical adventure is featured in this month's Guided Tour—but only on the *PC Games* Web site will you find exclusive pictures that detail the effort that went into making this visual gaming feast.

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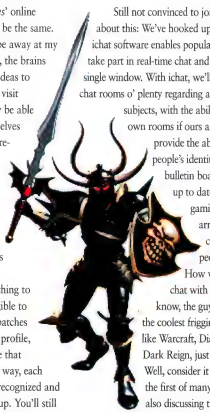
What to Expect From Battlezone!

The face of Battlezone—*PC Games*' online multiplayer resource—will never be the same. Why? Because as I frantically type away at my keyboard to produce this little blurb, the brains behind the site are racking out new ideas to implement. For starters, people who visit Battlezone for the first time will now be able to create individual profiles of themselves and use that identity each time they re-visit. By filling out your free profile, you'll become a Battlezone member, meaning you can take advantage of all the great areas that we're currently working on.

What can possibly be cool about becoming a member? For starters, it's free, so why the hell not? You've got absolutely nothing to lose and everything to gain! Seriously, though, you'll be eligible to receive free CDs packed with game patches and demos. Also, when you create a profile, you can choose a specific game genre that you're particularly interested in; that way, each time you enter Battlezone, you'll be recognized and placed into that primary interest group. You'll still be able to enter the other forums as well; this just means your primary forum will be your home. As a result, you'll be able to interact with other gamers who have the same interests as you, without the hassle of searching around for them. Cool, huh?

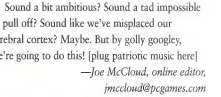


Still not convinced to join in? Well, how about this: We've hooked up with ichat. The ichat software enables popular Web browsers to take part in real-time chat and HTML within a single window. With ichat, we'll be able to provide chat rooms o' plenty regarding a number of gaming subjects, with the ability to create your own rooms if ours aren't enough. We'll provide the ability to view other people's identities, a plethora of bulletin boards so you can stay up to date with all the latest gaming buzz, and arrange for scheduled conferences with people in the industry. How would you like to chat with Ron Millar? You know, the guy who designed only the coolest friggin' games around, like Warcraft, Diablo, and currently Dark Reign, just to name a few. Well, consider it done. Ron will be the first of many to come. We're also discussing the possibility of providing some lucky gamers with free space on our server! Imagine having your personal site directly linked to PC Games.com. Just think of the traffic you'll get! So start brushing up on your HTML and get your Web pages ready, 'cause we're gonna be lookin'!

This is what Battlezone is about and what we're hoping to provide. But while the community aspect of Battlezone is super, it's only a small part of what we're offering. You see, once you've signed up as a member of Battlezone and entered into your primary interest group, you'll have a direct line to a number of online-game providers—one-stop shopping, essentially. We're also working very closely right now with the Total Entertainment Network (TEN) to give Battlezone members the chance to win free limited memberships to TEN and free subscriptions to *PC Games*. Interested yet? Well, you're going to have to join if you want to participate, and joining is free, so go for it.

Sound a bit ambitious? Sound a tad impossible to pull off? Sound like we've misplaced our cerebral cortex? Maybe. But by golly googley, we're going to do this! [plug patriotic music here]

—Joe McCloud, online editor, jmccloud@pcgames.com



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PC Games.com Has the Interviews You Want

That's right, baby! We're posting the interviews that you've been waiting for. We've started really juicing up our site with exclusive one-on-one talks with the people who are influencing the way games on the PC are played today.

Take Ron Millar, the ex-senior game designer behind Warcraft and Diablo. Did you know that Ron has left Blizzard to work for Activision as creative consultant for its upcoming Dark Reign? Well, he has, and PC Games.com has got the skinny on what his new job is all about.

But we don't stop there. We also have interviews with individuals who have just broken onto the scene. Upcoming interviews will include many industry insiders who we'll be speaking with at this year's E3. We're also working on a way to stream live video so you can actually view an interview as it's taking place, or watch previously recorded interviews; it's something we're trying to iron out before the convention. Our interviews will go all the way down to the source, exploring timely topics like what entry-level positions are available in the game industry, how to get started, and how to get a foot in the door. This a huge business, but without the knowledge and inside information, it's a hard one to crack.

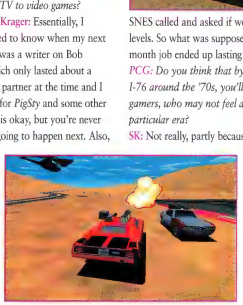
That's where PC Games.com comes in. We're creating a dedicated interviews section within our site that will archive past interviews and feature our most recent Web-exclusive talks with the pros about how they got started, and where games are going.

For now, here's a snippet from an interview with Scott Krager, the producer of Activision's new auto-combat-sim Interstate '76. This interview, along with many others, is already appearing in its entirety on our site. Enjoy!

Joe McCloud
Online Editor

PC Games: I've heard that you actually began in the television industry, writing for television shows. What triggered the switch from TV to video games?

Scott Krager: Essentially, I wanted to know when my next paycheck was coming. I was a writer on Bob Newhart's last show, which only lasted about a season. Then my writing partner at the time and I started writing freelance for *PigSty* and some other shows. Freelance [work] is okay, but you're never quite sure about what's going to happen next. Also, there really weren't too many opportunities, so our agent at the time became interested in interactive, and he gave us a call. He said that Activision was looking for a couple of writers to develop some characters in a story for this street hoops game, sort of a *White Men Can't Jump* basketball game. And my friend and I were like, "Yeah, we'd love to," cause we were both gamers. So we interviewed and they liked us and we started writing for this basketball game that, as you probably know, never got finished. But the guy who was doing Pitfall: The Mayan Adventure for the Genesis and SNES called and asked if we'd like to design some levels. So what was supposed to be like a three-month job ended up lasting for over a year.



PCG: Do you think that by basing the theme of I-76 around the '70s, you'll turn off younger gamers, who may not feel a connection to that particular era?

SK: Not really, partly because there seems to be sort of a resurgence of popularity around the '70s in the form of music and certain fashions. Also, re-runs have helped keep the '70s around. Turn on the TV any time of day, and you can find something that's '70s-related. The other cool thing about it is that the young gamers or people who weren't involved with the '70s will find that few games have chosen this time as the backdrop, which makes it stand out. And the way we've done it, we're not poking fun at it so much as paying respect to it. While people might associate the '70s with *Brady Bunch* and other cheesy stuff, we didn't go for that. We went for the muscle cars and the *Pulp Fiction* grit, which I think people will dig. Actually, some of the inspiration for the movie came by watching Starsky and Hutch re-runs...

If you'd love to see an interview with a specific person in the games industry, let us know: send e-mail to jmccloud@pcgames.com. If it's something that we can arrange, we'll do it. As with the magazine, our goal is to provide the material you're looking for. Take advantage of it.

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INCOMING!

Question of the Month: The PC/Console Debate

Everyone—from longtime PC gamers to the newest of newbies—knows that the best computer games can provide an extraordinary gaming experience. Even a quarter-bearing arcade freak would concede that point. But what do you think about the consoles—the Saturn, the PlayStation, and, of course, the Nintendo 64? How do they compare to the PC as game-playing machines? How do console games compare to their PC counterparts? What are each platform's strengths and weaknesses? Are consoles and computers competing for gamers, or is there plenty of room for both? We want to hear your opinion; as always, one letter-writer will win a free game and a free *PC Games* T-shirt. Write to us at Letters to the Editor, PC Games, 951 Mariner's Island Blvd., Suite 700, San Mateo, CA 94404; fax: 415-349-7482; or e-mail: pcgamesletters@pcgames.com. Please include your full name with each letter.

Net Play = The Best Way

This is in response to Ben Dunaway's "LANd of Opportunity" letter (March 1997) about how he and some friends set up a relatively cheap LAN. I don't doubt that the $48 you used to set up your LAN was well worth it. However, many other people, including myself, find it cheaper and more exhilarating to be playing over the Internet via Battle.net and other free or low-cost game servers, such as Quake's TCP/IP interface. It's not just playing the game at the highest possible speed that counts; it's simply more fun to be playing with different people each time—people from around the world. Internet play may not yet be the best way to play a game, but for the moment, it's the cheapest and most accessible place for everyone.

As for "newbies," The Opponent's piece ("Friends First, Enemies Later," March 1997, page 30) hit the issue on the spot. I agree entirely with the part about veterans threatening or killing novices. Battle.net and the people playing on it should get a reward for helping newbies the way they are. Even though there are some who feel newbie-hunting is quite fun, PKs (player killers) usually don't attack newbies—they leave their hunting for higher-level players. If you're a beginner on Battle.net, you can be quite assured that there are more people helping you then killing you.

Patrick Lehner (also known as pat2 on Battle.net)
Via the Internet

The Lure of Sniping

I just read Blade's recent column ("Come Out and Fight Like a Man," February 1997, page 30), and I have to disagree with him in a couple of ways.

He's lumped all campers/snipers in with people who camp at spawning locations. In my opinion, it's not just acceptable, but intelligent to find a strategic position and hang out there. My own personal favorite spot in Quake is DM3 (The Abandoned Base), on the catwalks above the lightning gun. Players come through there quite often, and I can control a significant chunk of the map from there. People are able to spawn around me and get armor and the rocket launchers to fight me. Am I camping? Sure. Am I denying players a fair fight? Some of them—the ones that run around like myopic pitbulls on crack.

On the other hand, I played in a Quake game a few months ago that had 10 to 12 people on one of the episodic levels. One player was camping in a very inaccessible spot that had rockets and overlooked a spawning site. There were two ways into this area, both of which generated distinctive noises when traveled. This guy was racking up tons of kills. I was killed about five times before I even realized where it was coming from. Once I did, I realized that I needed a grenade launcher and some armor to take him out. I suddenly had a mission: to terminate this schmo.

I got the stuff, battled my way to him, zipped backward up a ramp, and took him out with indirect grenade fire. It was one of the most satisfying Quake experiences I've had. In the midst of the routine shoot-'em-up, I perceived an opponent's pattern, and conceived and implemented a strategy that made him scream in anguish. It was a lot more fun than screaming "Camper!" at him.

That said, I prefer smaller deathmatch games with three to four people, where the players are hunter and hunted. The gameplay involves listening to your environment to try to localize your opponents, chasing them down, and killing them.

By the way, I usually go by either Santa or Nemo, and often have "RSE" tagged onto my name. Hope to see you out there.

Jon Owen
Via the Internet

What an article. You expressed feelings I've been wanting to let out every time I play Quake. So-called "camping" is everywhere in the gaming world. I'm glad to see somebody step up and tell the gamers who snipe to get easy kills that it shouldn't be tolerated anymore.

Trent Burnison
Via the Internet

Ideas for Sale

I am writing to you concerning the lack of interest, support, and acceptance of younger gamers in the PC and video-game industry. I'm frustrated with no one listening to my ideas. I am 13, and play nearly every game any older gamer plays, but my age group seems to be ignored. I am talking about writing to game companies and receiving a nice "We will consider your suggestions" letter back. Of course, your ideas never come to be, and you have to wait 10 years to learn to program and make a successful game, but by then you're either forgotten or the genre is no longer popular. I have lots of good ideas, but everyone is ignoring me.

I have become so upset with this that I have started my own company. It consists of myself and two of my friends, who are both excellent artists. We have only one problem: we can't program, and can't afford to hire a programmer, so we are forced to use crappy "gamemakers" like Game-Maker or GCS. I recently wrote to Epic MegaGames about licensing its amazing Unreal engine; I got no response. I tried using Quake, but I misunderstood what Quake C was and ended up sending it back. So I'm left where I started from: no gamemaker, no license, no programmer, and no response! Even game publishers are ignoring me!

What I would really like is for companies to look at all game ideas and not make discretion due to age. Anyone should be able to contribute, and they should get credit or money or something else. Any game companies interested in my games, please contact me! I have level designs, storylines, and art for three titles, and I would love to work with you on them!

Matt Dolmage
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Das Boot Online

Sub warfare hits the Net

Those pesky Brits. Just when you think it's safe to count their island backwater out, it produces something worth caring about, like the Who, Newcastle Brown Ale, the Sheffield Wednesday soccer team, Laker Airways, the Hawker Harrier jump jet, or Samantha Fox. Now you can add to the list Iron Wolves, an online-only World War II multiplayer submarine-warfare game from On-Line PLC.

Resembling a Windows 95 SVGA update of the venerable Sub Battle Simulator, but tweaked for Internet play, Iron Wolves follows the Air Warrior model with one major difference—commercial game networks or ISP go-betweens are not required.

"Iron Wolves is designed to run off our server," says On-Line technical director Jonathan Mullins. "We installed a beefed-up server in the States at the end of March to handle the increase in log-ons since we went commercial. Prior to that, everything during the beta test was being handled by our UK server."

Sure enough, when *PC Games* had a chance to try out Iron Wolves, the British-based server handled the periscope action just fine.

"We designed this game with low-latency access in mind," Mullins says. "Most of us started out designing games that could be played over a 2,400-baud modem, so our goal was to allow anyone across the world to have an enjoyable multiplayer experience."

Built for low-latency connections, Iron Wolves can be played across the world.

At the moment, Iron Wolves allows players to captain a German U-boat, a Commonwealth corvette, or an American destroyer. Marketing director Clement Chambers says more vessels will be added soon. "In a few months we'll be adding larger fleet subs, tankers, cruisers, and aircraft carriers," he reveals.

All the ships are single-player-driven, except for cruisers and aircraft carriers, which feature multiple player stations as in Air Warrior.

"Someone will be able to command the cruiser, where it goes, and what targets are presented to gun and depth-charge crews," Chambers says. "Then the gunners will have the job of sinking the targets. With aircraft carriers, players can sign on as pilots and attack enemy ships."

Chambers says On-Line will add new vessels after taking into account suggestions from players. "We want Iron Wolves to be player-driven," he says. "As long as the suggestion is in line with the World War II era, we'll jump on it."

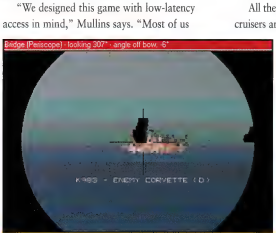
By the end of summer, Iron Wolves will also include historical scenarios, beginning with "Sink the Bismarck." But Chambers says players will not be able to sign on to a given scenario without amassing a qualifying number of kills. The scenarios will also be cooperative by design, he says.

"If you go up against the *Bismarck* with a single cruiser, you're going to get sunk straight away," Chambers explains. "I realize some people like that sort of thing, but the scenarios will force players to work together to complete the mission."

For now, anyone interested in playing Iron Wolves can go to **www.uboat.com** and download the necessary software, which weighs in at less than 1MB. Mullins says anyone with Windows 95 or Windows NT, as well as an ISP, can play.

On-Line's initial pricing is $2 per night or $10 for 14 days. The company is also looking for a U.S. publisher for a retail package that will include a solo-play version of the game, as well as an unspecified number of pre-paid hours of online play.

—George T. Chronis



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Direct3D Under Attack

id won't be making a Direct3D version of Quake.

Although 3D-accelerator hardware is here to stay, what development tools game designers use to support these video cards is becoming a big question mark.

With the success of Windows 95 and the promise of NT, Microsoft's Direct3D application programming interface should be the slam-dunk choice; it has a strong lead in the consumer 3D-accelerator market, many games supporting it have already been published, and most importantly, it's Microsoft's API. But a growing number of prominent gamemakers are throwing up their hands in frustration and vowing to use OpenGL instead.

According to many game programmers, including id Software's John Carmack, Direct3D is bulky, inefficient, and unnecessary when compared to OpenGL. Carmack, in a recent public announcement, said: "I started porting GLQuake to Direct3D…with the intent of learning the API and doing a fair comparison. Well, I have learned enough about it. I'm not going to finish the port. I have better things to do with my time."

Although Microsoft representatives would not answer questions regarding Direct3D, issues surrounding how well it works have a big impact on gamers. Programming for Direct3D is very difficult—the lack of documentation and a reference standard for Direct3D hardware means that compatibility testing with various graphics cards is nearly impossible. All of these weaknesses have caused problems that have become familiar to most game players; configuring a game to work with your particular Direct3D accelerator is difficult at best. Getting a variety of Direct3D games to all run correctly can take hours of work.

What's worse, since we're talking about Microsoft, virtually all the consumer graphics vendors publicly jumped on the Direct3D bandwagon, because the industry learned long ago that it's very risky to compete against Microsoft. Since the shortcomings of Microsoft's initial release of Direct3D have become painfully evident, OpenGL advocates have stepped up to in an effort to grab the game market, despite the lack of centralized organization that Microsoft is so good at.

In contrast, the OpenGL standard is governed by a loose coalition of various companies, including Silicon Graphics, Intergraph, NewTek, and others. Software support for OpenGL is mostly limited to high-end professional 3D modeling and animation applications. Typical OpenGL accelerator cards cost over $1,000, and, in most cases, more than $2,000, which has limited OpenGL penetration in the consumer 3D market.

But OpenGL has a number of advantages. It's multiplatform, with versions for Macintosh, SGI, Windows NT, Windows 95, OS/2, and even DOS, among others. Direct3D is currently limited to Windows 95, although Microsoft has announced plans to eventually support it under Windows NT. Additionally, OpenGL has a strong infrastructure, thanks to its industry consortium and eight-year history. Documentation for OpenGL is readily available and complete. Even more important, according to many programmers and board designers, is the fact that OpenGL has a stable reference platform, which makes ensuring compatibility and measuring performance much easier.

OpenGL's ease of use is leading a growing number of programmers and designers to push it for games. They point out that the 3D market is still relatively tiny, and as a percentage of the overall game market, neither API has a significant advantage.

Technically, says John Schimpf, OpenGL product manager at Silicon Graphics, moving to OpenGL from Direct3D shouldn't be difficult for game programmers, chip suppliers, or board vendors. "There are no technical reasons for Direct3D to exist. The reason we have two APIs is that Microsoft simply likes to be in control," he says.

Although few companies have openly committed to supporting OpenGL rather than Direct3D, some are taking the more cautious approach of supporting both. 3Dlabs' new Permedia 3D graphics chip, which is used in a number of mid-cost graphics cards, comes with drivers for

GAME BYTES

Into the Shadows In Doubt

Something is up at Scavenger. Although Into the Shadows was one of the most talked-about games shown at last year's E3, word in the development community is that the game is in limbo after a falling-out between Scavenger and its development partner, Triton. Repeated attempts to call Scavenger's Los Angeles and Boston offices to confirm the status of the company went unanswered. Speculation is that as many as 40 employees may have been laid off, and there's word that many of Scavenger's development teams are also shopping their projects around at other studios. No word yet on Into the Shadows, which was last seen in demo form late last year, or other promising titles such as the Tomb Raider–esque Angel or Tarantula.

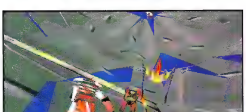
USB Version of SpaceOrb

Intel's universal serial bus (USB) is big news for gamers who want controllers that are easier to configure and deliver faster connections. Spacetec becomes one of the first peripheral-makers to support USB with a new version of its SpaceOrb 360 controller. The SpaceOrb resembles a gamepad with a ball-topped controller that's mounted on the left side of the pad. Spacetec expects to be in full production by summer; link to **www.spacetec.com** for more information.

both APIs. Even so, Schimpf doesn't see this as a big trend, explaining: "They are one of the first companies to cross from the high-end to the consumer market. The game market is very cost-sensitive." The extra costs of supporting dual compatibility will limit the success of this approach, he believes.

Intergraph product manager Rob Esterling also believes the two APIs will coexist for the near term. Intergraph, one of the most aggressive proponents of OpenGL in the professional realm, recently released its first consumer-based 3D graphics card, the Intense 3D, a Direct3D accelerator based on the Rendition chipset. Says Esterling: "Even though we have built our core business around being the leader in OpenGL performance on the Wintel platform, there's not really a choice for the consumer market. Microsoft has promoted Direct3D as the standard for Windows 95, especially for games."

But while Direct3D's support in the industry may be broad, it is also weak at best, and continually shrinking.



HyperBlade is one of the first Direct3D games.

Microsoft recently announced that it had discontinued plans to release Direct3D version 4.0. Instead, the company has announced that it is working on version 5.0 for release in the second half of the year.

Although Direct3D still enjoys the public support of virtually all card manufacturers and many game developers, Schimpf claims that "with the confusion, the jury is still out on Direct3D." —*J. V. Bolkan*

John Carmack's OpenGL Post

Read it for yourself. Quake programmer John Carmack didn't pull any punches in his critique of Direct3D and support of OpenGL last December. What follows is the first half of his Internet post. To read the entire letter, go to our Web site at **www.pcgames.com.**

John Carmack

"I am going to use this installment of my .plan file to get up on a soapbox about an important issue to me: 3D API. I get asked for my opinions about this often enough that it is time I just made a public statement. So here it is, my current position as of December '96…

While the rest of id works on Quake 2, most of my effort is now focused on developing the next generation of game technology. This new generation of technology will be used by id and other companies all the way through the year 2000, so there are some very important long-term decisions to be made.

There are two viable contenders for low-level 3D programming on Win32: Direct3D Immediate Mode, the new, designed-for-games API, and OpenGL, the workstation-graphics API originally developed by SGI. They are both supported by Microsoft, but D3D has been evangelized as the one true solution for games.

I have been using OpenGL for about six months now, and I have been very impressed by the design of the API, especially its ease of use. A month ago, I ported Quake to OpenGL. It was an extremely pleasant experience. It didn't take long, the code was clean and simple, and it gave me the greatest bed to rapidly try out new research ideas.

I started porting GLQuake to Direct3D IM with the intent of learning the API and doing a fair comparison. Well, I have learned enough about it. I'm not going to finish the port. I have better things to do with my time.

I am hoping that the vendors shipping second-generation cards in the coming year can be convinced to support OpenGL. If this doesn't happen early on and there are capable cards that GLQuake does not run on, then I apologize, but I am taking a little stand in my little corner of the world with the hope of having some small influence on things that are going to affect us for many years to come.

Direct3D IM is a horribly broken API. It inflicts great pain and suffering on the programmers using it, without returning any significant advantages. I don't think there is ANY market segment that D3D is appropriate for; OpenGL seems to work just fine for everything from Quake to SoftImage. There is no good technical reason for the existence of D3D.

I'm sure D3D will suck less with each forthcoming version, but this is an opportunity to just bypass dragging the entire development community through the messy evolution of an ill-birthed API.

Best case: Microsoft integrates OpenGL with Direct X (probably calling it Direct-GL or something), ports D3D Retained Mode on top of GL, and tells everyone to forget they ever heard of D3D Immediate Mode. Programmers have one good API, vendors have one driver to write, and the world is a better place…"

GAME BYTES

3D Realms and Activision Duke It Out

Activision has been publicizing the fact that it will be releasing titles developed by Hipnotic Interactive, the new development studio founded in part by five ex-Apogee employees. When Activision put out a press release saying that these former 3D Realms staffers were part of the core creative team that worked on Duke Nukem 3D, Apogee fired back a press release of its own denouncing Activision's take on the issue—clarifying that only one of the five, Richard "Levelord" Gray, could be considered a core member of the Duke team. The press-release war continued with another Activision announcement quoting chairman and CEO Bobby Kotick: "We refer anyone who has doubts about the members of Hipnotic's involvement with Duke Nukem 3D to look at the *Duke Nukem User Guide*, where the five Hipnotic employees are photographed and/or cited as being part of the 'Duke Team.'" We suggest the two parties settle their differences out of court in a winner-take-all Dukematch.

3Com Acquires U.S. Robotics

First it was Diamond snapping up Supra; now, network-card-maker 3Com is acquiring U.S. Robotics. Internet access and online gaming are making premier modem-makers the hot buy, and 3Com is putting together a stock deal worth $6.6 billion to close the sale. 3Com says adding U.S. Robotics' industry-leading modem technology will allow it

continued on page 32

Quake Server to Handle 32 Players

Thanks to id's updated server, Quake games can now hold twice as many people.

The guys at id have a bad-ass refinement to their Quake-server technology near completion—and the most notable change is busting the 16-player barrier. That limit was originally set because early versions of the server started experiencing some lag with more than 16 players, but director of business development Barrett Alexander says id has been working continuously to enhance all aspects of Quake, and upping the server is another step in that process.

"It's not really a mod, but a fairly major enhancement to the server code itself," he explains.

Although definitely tantalizing, setting up a 32-player match could also be a problem for existing Quake levels—as in, where do you put all the players? To facilitate testing of the new option, Alexander says id staff members have spliced together three existing large Quake levels to create one massive multiplayer level that can handle 32 deathmatchers.

"I'm sure there will be level designers out there somewhere who will make some cool enormous levels," he says.

Another big benefit from optimizing the server code, he says, is that games with under 16 players will also experience less lag when everyone is in the same room at once. "The work done to make 32 players possible is also a benefit to regular-sized games," Alexander says. id wouldn't say when the server update would be ready for distribution, or exactly how it would be distributed. —*George T. Chronis*

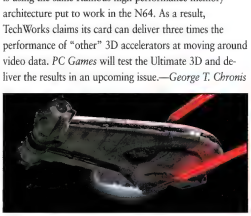
Shadows of the Empire Descends on the PC

We know you're confused about 3D accelerator cards, and you probably don't want to hear about another slab of silicon, but get ready for a major new player in the 3D video wars—TechWorks. Best known for its memory upgrade kits, TechWorks has just released its Ultimate 3D accelerator line, pricing it to move at $99.95 and under and shipping it with an aggressive game bundle that includes Direct3D versions of Shadows of the Empire and MDK.

That's right, Shadows—the *Star Wars* game that was supposed to be Nintendo 64–only. TechWorks says it's getting the first bundle release of the game for PCs, before a retail package is available in the fourth quarter. At press time, developer LucasArts had not confirmed its PC release plans for the game.

Through July, TechWorks is selling the 4MB Ultimate 3D Model 644 for $99, and the 2MB Model 642 for $79. After July, the prices go to $129 and $99, respectively. Check out **www.techworks.com** for more information.

The N64 connection makes sense, because TechWorks is using the same Rambus high-performance memory architecture put to work in the N64. As a result, TechWorks claims its card can deliver three times the performance of "other" 3D accelerators at moving around video data. *PC Games* will test the Ultimate 3D and deliver the results in an upcoming issue.—*George T. Chronis*



GAME BYTES

Continued from page 31

to build faster and easier-to-use products. The company expects the consumer networking market to explode in coming years as people "wire" their homes, and 3Com coveted U.S. Robotics' experience and popularity at retail sales.

EA Opens Game Studio in Seattle

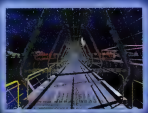
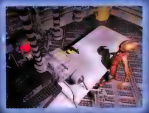
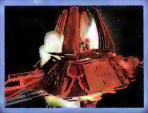
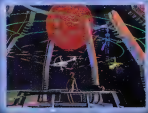
Electronic Arts is muscling in on Microsoft's hood. Not only did EA steal away Anthony Garcia from Bill Gates' entertainment business unit, but Garcia will direct EA's new game-design operations in Seattle, Wash. EA Seattle will concentrate on new computer and console games for "advanced systems." The San Francisco Bay Area publisher expanded into the Pacific Northwest last year upon acquiring Manley & Associates. EA built its new facility, which is being run as a subsidiary, to attract top creative talent in the area and provide a state-of-the-art base to keep up with expected growth in the games genre.

CD-ROM Drive With Remote Control

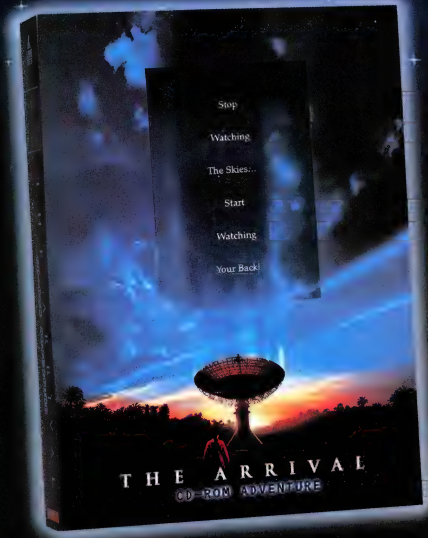
Could a computer someday replace the home stereo? Not only are sound cards and speaker systems delivering outstanding digital sound quality, but now Creative is making a 12X CD-ROM drive with its own credit card–sized remote control. The iNFRA 1800 drive will be available by itself for $169, or in a bundle with Creative's AWE64 card and a speaker set for $299.

THE ARRIVAL

CD-ROM ADVENTURE

ACTUAL GAME PLAY



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Online Gaming Services Exposed

By Daniel Morris

As the online gaming services emerge, PC Games will be keeping close tabs on the major players each month on this page. We'll let you know what games are currently available on each service, which are in the pipeline, and what treats the services are readying for their subscribers. You'll also find updated rates and current subscriber bases. Now you'll have the skinny on which services are charging more or less, offering hits or dogs, and drawing customers or flies.

You'll also find the buzz on what's happening in these online communities in EyeBrowse. (What would the Internet Revolution be without some gossip on the block?)

Game Enablers

www.kali.net

Currently Available:
Any IPX-compatible game (Big Red Racing, Command & Conquer, Deadlock, Descent, Descent II, Diablo, Duke Nukem 3D, Master of Orion II, MechWarrior 2: Mercenaries, NetMech, Su-27 Flanker, Warcraft, Warcraft II, you name it)

Exclusives:
None

Upcoming:
Kali works with most new games that are IPX-compatible

Rates: $20 one-time fee

Subscribers: 100,000

www.teleport.com/~nbright

Currently Available:
Any IPX-compatible game

Exclusives:
None

Upcoming:
Kahn works with most new games that are IPX-compatible

Rates: $15 one-time fee

Subscribers: Not available

EYEBROWSE

• Mplayer's decision to provide its service free of charge is based on the company's belief that advertising revenue is enough to remain profitable. Ironically, Engage Games Online went live March 15 with an hourly billing system, saying that the monthly subscriber model wasn't going to work. It's interesting to note that Engage is offering gamers a choice between two different hourly rates, one rate a little more expensive because it comes without advertising. TEN hasn't changed its monthly flat-rate model at all.

• Sick of showing up in Diablo's dungeons and then getting bushwhacked by other players? Post a note on the Mplayer Diablo "Bounty Wall" and you'll get your vengeance...for a price. After being repeatedly mugged and killed by a Level 20 sorcerer, a frustrated Florida housewife put out a hit, paying 1,000 gold pieces to Skull_Krusher_Deluxe to seek out the bandit and assassinate him. She got the sorcerer's ear, and the bounty hunter got his cash reward. If *Godfather*-style retribution strikes your fancy, check out the scene at **www.mplayer.com/cgi-bin/rroom.cgi?13@@.ee6b995.** (Note: You'll need to sign up for a free screen name/password first.)

www.gamesonline.com

Currently Available:
Castles II, Descent Online, Rolemaster: Magestorm, Warcraft II: Tides of Darkness

Exclusives:
Warcraft II: Tides of Darkness

Upcoming:
Battlechess 4000, Dragon Dice, Rolemaster: Bladelands, Shattered Steel, Splatterball, Virtual Pool

Rates: $1.95/hr. with ads, $2.50/hr. ad-free

Subscribers: Not available at press time

www.ten.net

Currently Available:
Command & Conquer, C&C: Red Alert, Dark Sun: Crimson Sands, Deadlock, Diablo, Duke Nukem 3D and Atomic Edition, Necrodome, Panzer General, Quake, Terminal Velocity, Warcraft

Exclusives:
Dark Sun: Crimson Sands, Duke Nukem 3D

Upcoming:
Big Red Racing, Blood, CivNet, Confirmed Kill, Falcon 4.0, Jagged Alliance: Deadly Games, Master of Orion II, Prey, Shadow Warrior, SimCity 2000, Top Gun, Total Mayhem

Rates: Flat rate: $29.95/mo.; Hourly rate: $9.95/5 hrs. per mo., $1.95/each addtl. hr.

Subscribers: 23,000–25,000

www.mplayer.com

Currently Available:
Big Red Racing, Command & Conquer, C&C: Red Alert, Deadlock, Diablo, MechWarrior 2 (Win 95 only), Quake, Terminal Velocity, Warcraft: Orcs and Humans, War Wind

Exclusives:
O-Ball

Upcoming:
Battleship, Chaos Overlords, Havoc, Monopoly, Panzer General (online only), Risk, Scrabble, SimCity 2000, Star General 2000

Rates: Mplayer: free; Mplayer Plus: $29.95/yr. for access to special online game tournaments and sponsored events

Subscribers: Over 20,000

www.ariesgames.com

Currently Available:
Air Warrior, Classic Card Games, Harpoon Online, Multiplayer BattleTech: Solaris, Online Casino, Stellar Emperor

Exclusives:
Jack Nicklaus 4

Upcoming:
Jack Nicklaus 4

Rates: No extra charge through AOL and CompuServe

Subscribers: Over 100,000 through AOL/CompuServe

www.dwango.com

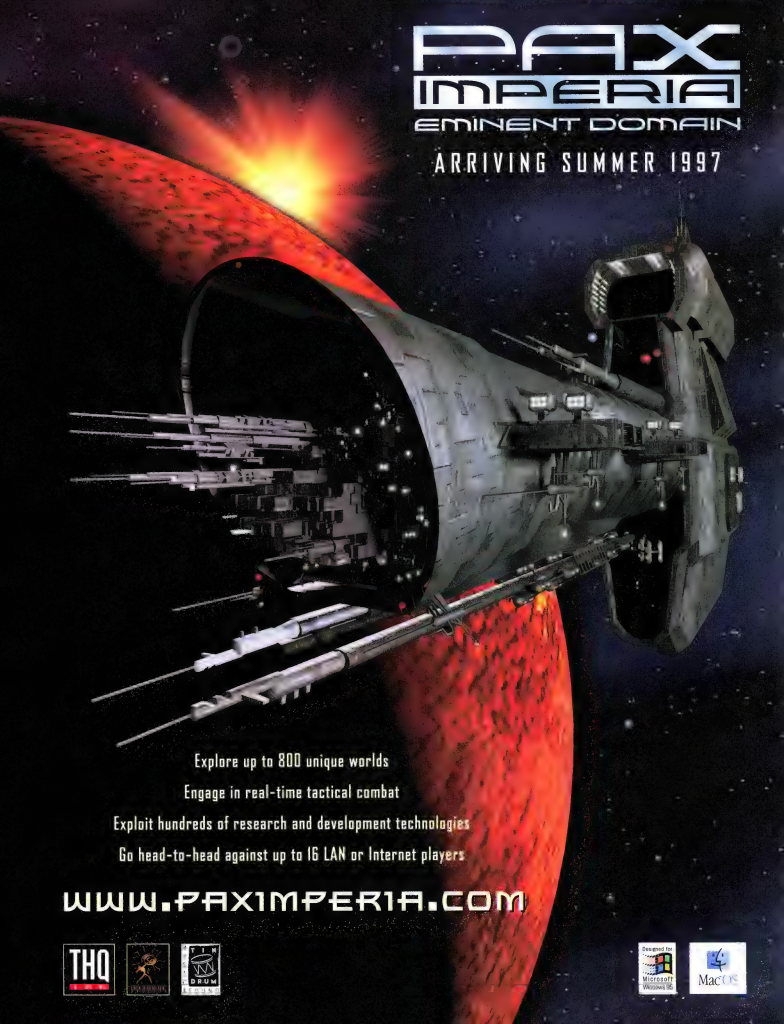
Currently Available:
Big Red Racing, Descent II, Doom, Doom II, Final Doom, Ultimate Doom, Duke Nukem 3D shareware, Heretic, Hexen, MechWarrior, Strife, Terminal Velocity, Warcraft II: Tides of Darkness

Exclusives:
None (by design)

Upcoming:
Not available at press time

Rates: $7.95/mo., $19/10 hrs., $34/20 hrs., $59/40 hrs. (5 free hrs. at sign-up)

Subscribers: Not released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Arnold Palmer at Oakland Hills, Hole 7

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Digital Anvil

Wing IV Guru Sets Up Shop

After years building a reputation at Origin working on the Wing Commander series, Chris Roberts is on a mission to make his new Digital Anvil studio something different—a designer-friendly organization. And he's doing it with Bill Gates' money.

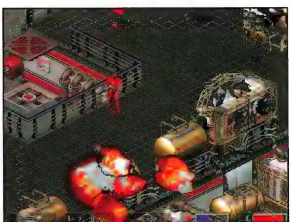
"I want Digital Anvil to be a place where we can make available the time and resources to attract the top talent in the game industry," Roberts says. "Too often, we're under too much pressure to rush titles out by unrealistic deadlines, saddled with budgets that are too small. I want this company to be a haven from those pressures and a place where designers can financially share more in their successes."

Now, you may remember that Roberts had $10 million to make Wing IV. Even that doesn't ensure a perfect world, he says, as there never was enough time to spend on Wing Commander titles because the demand for sequels from Origin and the marketplace was always enormous. That's why he approached Microsoft to provide an investment in Digital Anvil.

"I was very upfront with them about what I was trying to do," he says. "If a game needs three more months to add polish, it's going to get the extra time. To their credit, they agreed and became an equity partner. Microsoft is serious about distributing quality games."

Roberts says the studio's first two releases won't be finished until fall 1998, with a third following early in 1999. Not surprisingly, one will be a space exploration and combat game. The second is a real-time strategy game that he likens to Diablo, except that it will feature starship fleet battles. "The game will look and play the same in solo play and multiplay," Roberts says. "We've been very impressed with what Blizzard has done to keep things simple in Battle.net—allowing for seamless segues between solo play and Net play—but what we have in mind will be much heavier on the 3D."

The third project is another real-time game with lots of "3D cinematics, big weapons, and copious mayhem," Roberts says. In all three cases, working titles are not firm enough to reveal. Each game will have "extremely large" multiplayer elements.



Crusader: No Remorse creator-producer-director Tony Zurovec is now at Digital Anvil.

Although Digital Anvil is still setting up its new Austin, Texas, facilities, Roberts has already enticed many of his co-workers from Origin to join him. Officially onboard are Erin Roberts, creator-producer of Privateer 2; Tony Zurovec, creator-producer-director of Crusader: No Remorse; and John Miles, who pioneered much of the graphics technology in the Wing Commander franchise.

Also playing a role at Digital Anvil is Robert Rodriguez, the film director responsible for *El Mariachi* and *Desperado*. "Robert is helping to design some of what we are putting together in our first titles, especially the video sequences," Roberts says.

Although the Wing Commanders are well-known for their abundant FMV sequences, Roberts says you won't see as much of it in Digital Anvil games.

"Some of the games will have FMV, and [these sequences] will be of the same quality as those we did for Wing Commander IV—there just won't be as many of them," he says. "FMV was a way for us to get away from animated talking heads, but it's not what we're all about."

Roberts is very aware that the high-end 3D accelerator hardware of today will be low-end by the time the first Digital Anvil games make it onto store shelves. Knowing that, he says, his programmers are concentrating mostly on 3Dfx and Rendition-based video cards. "A lot of what we'll do with 3D will be directed specifically at video hardware," he says. "We think it's better to ship with custom support for different cards."

As for whether Digital Anvil will program with Direct3D or OpenGL, Roberts says it would be kind of hard to ignore Direct3D given that Microsoft is a partner, but no decision has been made.

"We're much more comfortable developing our own solutions in-house, which gives us the advantage of being ahead of what's out there already," he says. "But for the hardware we don't support directly, we definitely will concentrate on software compatibility." —*George T. Chronis*

THE PLAYER

STEVE KLETT

You Work, I Play

Like a lot of people, The Player enjoys reading the Sunday paper at a leisurely pace. Few sections are skipped—not even the classifieds (although he does love his job). Recently, he encountered an ad that he felt compelled to share:

> For sale: One excellent first-person action game.
> State-of-the-art 3D engine, realistic polygonal enemies, awesome graphics, multiplayer-ready.
> Ready to run out of the box.
> You add the fun.
> Asking price: $49.99.

Sounded pretty good to The Player…until he got to that "You add the fun" part. Say what? Further investigation revealed that the game in question was written in a standard programming language that gamers could use to modify the game in any number of ways.

For instance, they could hack some code to add a grappling hook to the list of available weapons, which they could then use in the game to scale walls or escape from nasty situations. Players could even go so far as to add vehicles, create variations of Capture the Flag, or offer a cruel twist on soccer in which players use a decapitated head for a ball.

At first, The Player was blown away by the possibilities. This was a cool feature—one that would go a long way toward extending the playable life of a game and enhance its fun factor dramatically. Yet, once the initial rush was over and he'd had some time to ponder the matter further, The Player wasn't so juiced about the idea.

Why? He took a long look at the game in question. Yes, it had a really cool 3D environment, and it was immersive, and it was fun to deathmatch. But its weapons were pretty ho-hum, its levels and episodes were incongruous—in short, it was essentially the same as the last game from the same company, just more technically sexy. Now, why hadn't the makers taken some time to put some cool original features into the game before putting it on shelves? Instead, they had relied on the blood and sweat of consumers to give the game some originality and truly compelling gameplay. Heck, they didn't even provide the public with the tools to modify the game—players had to hack those themselves. Meanwhile, they were reaping the benefits through increased sales of the game. Hmmmmmm….

By now, you can all probably guess the game to which The Player's referring. It's a little title called Quake that's all the rage right now online—and in the *PC Games* offices—largely because of the vast number of user modifications that crop up virtually every day.

Before going any further, The Player wants to make it clear that he thinks the ability to modify a game is very cool, and he's been enjoying Quake's Capture the Flag and President mods very much. (The latter game pits teams of players against each other, with one squad trying to prevent the president's assassination by the other squad.)

However, he's worried that game developers will rely on the modifications too much—that they will release games that aren't as polished as they could be, with the expectation that their customers will do the work for them.

It's become clear that this configurability has become a standard in the first-person genre. Both LucasArts' upcoming Jedi Knight and Epic MegaGames' Unreal will allow the same degree of modification as Quake, perhaps even more—the Unreal Editor, for example, will be made available to the public by Epic.

The first warning signs of over-reliance on modification are beginning to crop up, particularly with Jedi Knight. When *PC Games* visited LucasArts for a preview, it was unclear if the game would include Internet multiplayer options when it ships—which is strange, considering that X-Wing vs. Tie Fighter was delayed so Lucas could add Internet play and that Jedi's biggest competitor, Quake, has it. In fact, the development team said they may just have the players hack the Internet play if they want it.

So envision a future, if you will, in which you go out and buy a game and then have to wait weeks or months for code-hacking enthusiasts to create the really fun features for your $50 purchase—after they're done for the day with their real jobs.

On the bright side, it could mean a job in the game industry for some of you hackers out there who demonstrate some true ingenuity. It happened for Steven Polge, a former IBMer who hacked the truly cool Reaper deathmatch bots for Quake and is now working on the AI for Unreal.

The Player will step off his soapbox with this final message to game developers: Putting in the ability to modify a game is definitely cool, but please, don't forget to add some fun yourself.

As always, send your thoughts, criticisms, and Quake mods to ThePlayer@pcgames.com.

ILLUSTRATION BY STEVEN M. FLEURY

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PC WORLD

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THE OPPONENT

BLADE

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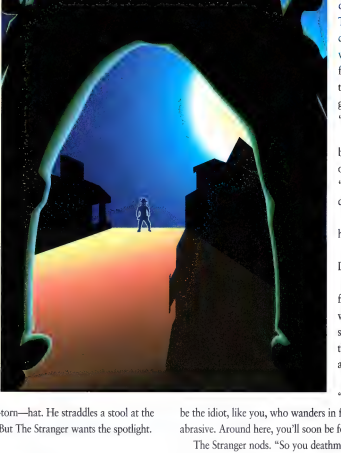
Tumbleweed drifts across the dust-strewn plain. The air is biting. Trouble is definitely brewing. The Opponent can sense it as he crosses through the wilderness, casting a chiseled glare at any who deign to watch. They know his name. He's been there before. A gunslinger always draws attention.

He sits in the saloon, whiskey in one hand, trigger-finger twitching, ready to strike at the first hint of trouble. He listens. Patiently. The banter from most is affable; this meeting place is a haunt for old friends and trusted enemies. From all corners of the country they have come, to stake their claim. To be seen. To be at the cutting edge. Strangers come to the tables, tentatively at first, but with increasing confidence. There are no men-with-no-names in this town, just men-with-slightly-strange names. But that's the way of the world, and everyone accepts it.



Saloon regulars offer a drink to the newcomers. The atmosphere is bright, almost friendly, but the chill wind of conflict still bubbles uncertainly under the surface.

Suddenly there's a cold blast as the doors fly open with a crash. The chill wind whips through the saloon, ruffling the shawls and hats of the regulars, bringing silence. They all turn to look. In the doorway is a silhouette. A new gunslinger is in town, and he's ready to make his entrance. The regulars pass disgruntled looks at each other—the mood chills.

In struts The Stranger, scowling at anyone who catches his gaze from under his weather-beaten—and weapon-torn—hat. He straddles a stool at the bar. The regulars return to their drinks. But The Stranger wants the spotlight. "You're all worthless," he bellows.

A silence descends once more. "Did you hear me?" No one seems interested. He raises his shot glass and smashes it forcefully on the bar. Now there's total silence, and a few of the friendly regulars give a knowing nod. "Thousands have fallen in my wake," The Stranger declares, "and you wusses are going to follow." At that, several stools crash on the floor as the regulars stand up en masse, each glaring at The Stranger. "Outside," they say calmly and in unison. Slowly, each picks up his gun belt and follows the other outside. With an eager grin plastered across his smug face, The Stranger follows. Silence.

After 10 minutes, one of the regulars saunters casually back in to the saloon. A wide grin spreads slowly across his face. He looks at The Opponent and they pass that knowing nod. Gradually, the other regulars come strolling back in and pick up their drinks and their conversations like nothing had happened.

Then The Stranger appears once more as a silhouette at the door. But this time there's something different. His imposing stance has wilted, his weapon-torn hat hangs limply, and his gun belt is empty. He staggers to the bar and drops in a dejected heap on a stool. The Opponent walks over. "I was a champion, numero uno," The Stranger whines. "I was the best I knew, the fastest, the sharpest. I knew all the tricks. Or so I thought." The Stranger glances up, eyes welling in pure disbelief. "I thought I was good."

"You are," comes a response from behind. The Stranger turns to face one of the regulars who had left with him. "You knew plenty of tricks…but so did we."

"I guess you're the main man around here," offers The Stranger.

The Regular shrugs. "Don't know. Don't take much notice," he replies.

"What are you doing out in this wild frontier, if you don't take any notice of where you stand against all the others?" says The Stranger, casting a glance at all the other faces. "I mean, you could have all the glory."

"For what?" asks The Regular. "There's no glory here. I don't want to be the idiot, like you, who wanders in from the cold all confident, loud, and abrasive. Around here, you'll soon be found out."

The Stranger nods. "So you deathmatch just for the fun of it?" he asks.

"Of course. That's the only way," replies The Regular. "Remember, there's always someone faster on the draw."

The Opponent can be found hanging out with the regulars under the moniker PCG_Blade wherever online games are played. As always, please send your comments to blade@pcgames.com.

ILLUSTRATION BY STEVEN H. FLEURY

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Why pay to make thousands of discs when you can offer a game right on the Net? Lots of companies are answering that question with online-only games, and in the process they're changing the nature of gameplay. *PC Games* looks at the Net-only genre and shows you where some of the best play is happening.

By Jason D'Aprile

Now that almost all new games are being released with multiplayer elements, the Internet is quickly becoming the place to find opponents, and companies are scurrying to discover new ways to capitalize on this growing new medium. From all corners of the industry, online-only games are coming out in droves. Is this the future of gaming?

Online-only games can go far beyond anything done in a single-player game by creating virtual, social environments. The reason is simple: If you are going to make a true playing environment that exists online and is dependent on human interaction to keep it going, then the game system has to be open-ended: you can't predict what the players will do, what directions they will go in, and how they will attempt to get there. For a game like SubSpace or Warbirds that is essentially action-based, the design goal may be just to plow as many gamers into one arena as possible while simultaneously finding the secret to keeping latency down. But if you are going to make truly interactive, growing environments—especially with role-playing games, or something like ICI's Planetary Raiders—the complexities of variables that human players throw into the game through normal play alone become immense.

MUDs have been working at this goal for years, and still continue to thrive (there are literally thousands of them throughout the world), but now companies are moving away from the text-based interface and are creating graphic environments for hacking and slashing. Developers are even employing new technology like MMX and 3D accelerators in the quest for an adventure that not only accommodates the needs of its players in terms of what you can do, but also can compete in visual and audio presentation with CD-based, single-player adventures—not to mention in ease of use.

Why Online Only?

In multiplayer games development, the devotion has usually been to LAN first, Internet second. Over the last year, we've seen more and more games come equipped with TCP/IP playable protocol, but frequently that's tacked-on, and Net play is thus not as seamless as it should be. The key, as online-only developers will tell you, is to build from the ground up to specifically accommodate your target.

All the problems of playing online, small and great, still end up coming down to one major obstacle: latency, the speed with which information is transmitted from the game server to your computer. For online-only developers, it's their primary problem; their whole focus is to develop in such a way that lag affects gameplay as little as possible. Fortunately for gamers, there've been some innovative approaches to conquering latency problems, and gaming itself is becoming more refined and playable every day. We've moved up from simple roots in text-only MUDs to graphic-based RPGs, real-time intense dog-fighting, racing, and conquering. No matter what type of gamer you are and what your genre of choice, there is almost certainly an online-only game somewhere that will accommodate you.

"It's compelling," says Christopher Yates, vice president of technology and operations at Virgin Interactive Entertainment and head of Burst, the maker of SubSpace. "We believe that the writing has been on the wall with respect to the growth in the market. It's very exciting, and facilitates doing something that you just can't do on any other platform: bringing people together from not only opposite ends of the city, or state, or country, but from all over the world to compete, to team up, and to communicate."

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Yates says the approach to developing online-only games takes some rethinking: "It's just a very, very different type of product. Most games aren't designed with the Internet in mind, and I think that massive multiplayer gaming—where you're hosting up to 100 people in a single arena—requires a different design philosophy. The development process is very different…but it's wonderful to be able to release a title, then hear a good suggestion the next day and be able to do another revision in a couple more days with that suggestion in there. It's just such a powerful form of development."

"Most people look at online gaming as an extension to solo play," says Richard Garriott, founder of Origin Systems. "Online-only demands, or at least gives you, the opportunity for a very different play style. If you look at the kind of games that we're pursuing with Ultima Online and some of these other [online]-only games, where we are truly providing alternate realities for players to explore, I think you'll find they're far more compelling to play on a worldwide basis."

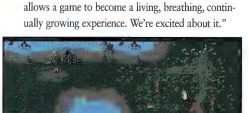
"Worldwide" is the key to much of the appeal of online gaming. Developers are convinced that the appeal of "meeting" someone a continent away is irresistible.

"When we first did our alpha test on Ultima Online, one of the first characters I ran into was an individual from Sweden, and it was very cool and interesting to be playing in real time with someone across the globe in an environment where we weren't shooting each other," Garriott says. "Because if we were just going to kill each other, it wouldn't matter what our unique cultural perspectives were. But since we were sharing an adventure and creating a shared experience, our different backgrounds and the fact that we were strangers was profoundly relevant to the fun of adventuring together."

Nearly all developers of online-only games seem to believe that the global level of interaction that these games allow is the greatest reason to approach the Internet as a viable gaming platform. Robert Salinas, vice president of marketing and sales for ICI (maker of Warbirds and Planetary Raiders), offers a perfect example: "Back in September, we actually had a convention for Warbirds, and over 100 people came to Dallas. People from as far as Finland and Sweden came just to meet the other players. That's how much of a community it is."

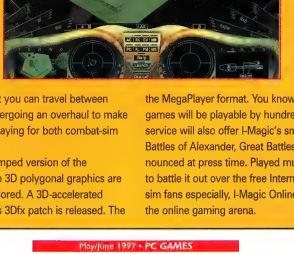
While that may be an extreme example, it's not necessarily a rarity. Casual gamers will always be coming into and out of the myriad online games that are out there, but most players seem to latch onto the titles that hold the most appeal to them, and these players soon form a community. The prevalence of leagues, squadrons, and clans that are cropping up for games like Ultima Online, Warbirds, Quake, and other titles—sometimes even before the game is released—furthers this point.

"You get to belong to a community," says Interactive Magic president Wild Bill Stealey. "And belonging is a cool experience. Online gaming allows a game to become a living, breathing, continually growing experience. We're excited about it."



PLANETARY RAIDERS

Right now, the most impressive online-only effort is ICI's Planetary Raiders (**www.icigames.com/pr/index.html**). More than just Warbirds in space, this space-flight combat simulator adds an in-depth, expansive trading and commerce system to its sci-fi universe. Players can do nearly anything they want to in this world—start businesses, dogfight, even own space stations if they get deeply enough into the game. You don't even have to enter the cockpit if you don't want to.



More than that, the game can hold a virtually infinite amount of players. Unlike Warbirds' arena system, where each battle can hold upward of 200 people, Planetary Raiders' arenas are treated as separate solar systems, and all these systems are interconnected so that you can travel between them at will. At press time, the game is undergoing an overhaul to make it much more user-friendly, and it's worth playing for both combat-sim and strategy players.

Planetary Raiders' flight engine is a revamped version of the Warbirds engine, and for the time being, the 3D polygonal graphics are still untextured, though nicely sharp and colored. A 3D-accelerated version is planned sometime after Warbird's 3Dfx patch is released. The game's flight engine is easy to jump into and very similar to Warbirds', though the many keyboard commands will likely have gamers flipping between the cockpit and the help screen for at least the first few games. To help with the user-friendliness, you can easily replace lost ships free of charge from a ship merchant on the Osis.com station. The game also has planetfalls for planetside trading and warp-drive travel for flying from system to system; of course, the depth of its trading design is almost limited to the players' imagination.

Warbirds and Planetary Raiders are part of ICI's MegaPlayer game line-up, and now that the company has merged with I-Magic (and is being renamed Interactive Magic Online), it will soon be transferring several of I-Magic's titles, including iM1A2 Abrams, to the MegaPlayer format. You know what that means: each of these games will be playable by hundreds of people at a time. The new service will also offer I-Magic's smaller, CD-ROM–based games: Great Battles of Alexander, Great Battles of Hannibal, and others not announced at press time. Played multiplayer, they'll allow 8 to 16 people to battle it out over the free Internet play section of this new service. For sim fans especially, I-Magic Online should prove to be a major player in the online gaming arena. —*JDA*

The Games

Action games have always been the easiest type of game to jump into, and for the most part the same is true of online gaming. SubSpace (**www.vie.com/subspace**), a superb Asteroids revamp, is a perfect example of this: It starts out with very shallow, enjoyable gameplay, but adds team play and game variations as you gain experience. Westwood is also gearing up for Sole Survivor (**www.westwood.com**), a free-for-all action game using the Red Alert engine. Survivor will hold up to 50 players in one arena, and will put you in control of a single unit that must gain enough strength to dominate and destroy opposing players' units. QuakeWorld (**www.stomped.com**), the Internet version of Quake, may not be very convenient to set up and use, but it turns Quake into a much more Internet-friendly game by eliminating as much extraneous data and details as possible, which in turn speeds up gameplay. It'll likely prove to be the model for many forthcoming action games once it's perfected (hopefully with the release of Quake 2).

Plenty of other companies are jumping into the action arena as well. Software giant Sony Games has BattleGround (**www.sonygames.com**), a futuristic tank-battle game that demands team play with up to four teams of five members each; it should be in beta testing right now. A 3D fighting game called Ascension: Myths and Legends (**www.reactive.com/gamedev.html**) is scheduled for later in the year. Ascension uses the RTime engine to lower play lag, and many gamers are waiting to see how it'll turn out, as fighting games are among the hardest to put online.

Action development isn't limited to huge companies. Small developers regularly create new games, many of which are worth searching for. Grokksoft's Hover Race (**www.grokksoft.com/hover.html**), for instance, is a fun shareware hovercraft-racing game that is extremely easy to set up and play, and supports up to eight players.

Pay service Engage Games (**www.engagegames.com**) has several notable online-only titles, though its actioner Rolemaster: Magestorm is the most popular. Magestorm, a first-person shooter, allows you to create a mage character from scratch and lets you defend your home turf while taking over your opponents'. The game stresses team play and can hold 50 or more players at a time while remaining extremely playable. The 16-bit graphics are quite attractive, and the same game engine was used to make another Engage title, Splatterball (an arcade-ish paintball simulator).

Given the fact that RPG/adventure games started this genre, it seems only fitting that a vast majority of the innovations in how we can interact over the Internet come via the new series of multiplayer RPGs. TEN's Dark Suns (**www.ten.net**) was an appealing start to the next wave of online role-playing—it regularly trails only Duke Nukem 3D in popularity on the service—but it suffers from an aging game engine and graphics. Fortunately for TEN, the Advanced Dungeons & Dragons theme, characters, and familiar rules will likely help the game maintain its following.

3DO's Meridian 59 (**http://meridian.3do.com/meridian**) is up and running now for a monthly fee, and has a fairly steady player base. It's generally regarded as one of the best pre–Ultima Online Internet RPGs. Another offering, AlterNet Realities' upcoming Phoenix Armada (**www.arcg.com**), looks to be a very ambitious small-publisher title. This space-based RPG will sport 16-bit graphics and will actively support MMX; it should be in beta by the time you read this.

The Realm, Sierra On-Line's (**www.realmserver.com**) graphic

EXTREME *(ik-ˈstrēm) adj*: exceeding the ordinary, average or expected.

ASSAULT *(ə-ˈsȯlt) n*: a violent physical attack.

Blue Byte

NO CD REQUIRED

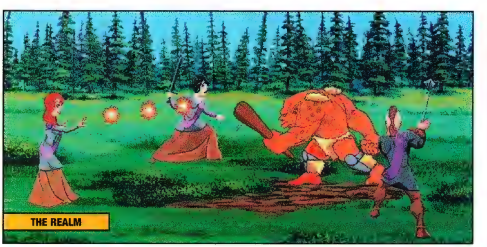
adventure, is available now, and the only fee is the cost of the front-end CD. The game's engine is aging and the graphics are almost from a side perspective, but the fantasy world it offers is quite good, and there are usually plenty of other adventurers playing.

Legends of Kesmai (from the makers of Air Warrior) is a pay-to-play overhead-view RPG available via online services such as AOL and Prodigy.

As always, many small developers are working on RPGs, both graphic and text-based—games like Furcadia (**www.realtime.net/furcadia**), Lords of Empyria (**http://realmsnet.com/realms.html**), and many others. Text-based games still have a devoted following, mainly in more traditional MUDs, but also with Engage's Darkness Falls, a horror-themed text-based RPG where you create a monster character for adventuring.

Obviously, Origin's Ultima Online (**www.owo.com/uo.html**) is the main contender in the realm of online RPGs; the general consensus among players is that all the others are simply warm-ups for this one, and beta testing should hopefully have started by now. Of course, Origin is already working on the design for Ultima Online 2, which will likely use Ultima IX's new 3D engine. With luck, there will be some stiff competition by then, since ICI has full plans to enter the online-RPG market with a skill-based offering. "We really want to make it," Salinas says. "Not a role-playing game, but a medieval simulation. We want to simulate things like having someone behind you and you don't see them but, [because you have enhanced perception], you can hear their footsteps, whereas another member of your party doesn't hear them."

Other genres are crossing into the online fray as well. There's a plethora of flight sims such as Confirmed Kill (see "Log On & Lock On," April 1997, page 35). VR-1 is making an intriguing-sounding sub-combat game with strategy elements called The S.A.R.A.C. Project, which could be the game fans of Archimedean Dynasty have been hoping for.



Naval buffs and strategy types alike will want to check out Iron Wolves (**www.uboat.com**), an intriguing action-based, World War II submarine/battleship simulator (see "*Das Boot* Online" on page 26 for more info).

For fans of sci-fi sims, there's always Kesmai's Multiplayer BattleTech: Solaris, available over services like America Online, but the game pales in comparison to MechWarrior 2's multiplay, even over the Internet.

And finally, for kids, there's Castle Infinity (**www.castleinfinity.com**), available in both a downloadable demo and a CD. Played only over the Net, this game mixes education with action to hold children's attention, and is one that parents may also enjoy.

NEW TOOLS OF THE TRADE

If the Internet is the new canvas for game designers, then new tools to paint with would logically follow suit. Both Macromedia's Shockwave (**www.macromedia.com/shockwave**) and Sun's Java (**www.javasoft.com**) were designed for this purpose.

Shockwave facilitates the handling of multimedia-style data—music, voice, sound, video—while Java is a cross-platform programming language for the Net. Currently, games employing either technology are, for the most part, pretty cheesy. Simple, mostly single-player arcade games and text adventures (you can find plenty of them on the VR-1 Web site) are being created with Java, although Planetary Raiders uses Java for the space station–based buying/selling/trading functions. Shockwave is mainly used for gimmicky "interactive" graphics on Web sites, although some companies are attempting more adventurous uses for it, such as Digital Planet's Madeline's Mind (**www.madmind.com**), best described as a soap/operatic sci-fi comic book. Still, interaction is minimal at best, and the loading and playback can be clunky and unreliable on normal modems. RTime (**www.rtimeinc.com**) has a developers kit specifically made to optimize game data for the Internet; some games will be using it soon, though there's nothing yet to test how well it works.

For more on Java-based games and online games in general, check out **www.multiplayer.com** and the Multiplayer Online Game Directory at **http://www.tc.umn.edu/nlhome/m041/fran0264/mpog/index.htm**. Of course, you should also explore The Battlezone on *PC Games*' own Web site, at **www.pcgames.com**. —*JDA*

COIN OR JOIN?

Some of the current online-only games cost money to play, while others are free, at least in beta testing (and usually not including the initial game purchase). Here's a breakdown:

FREE:

SubSpace (in beta; may be pay-to-play later), Sole Survivor, QuakeWorld, BattleGround (beta), Phoenix Armada (beta), The Realm, Furcadia (beta), Lords of Empyria (beta), Ultima Online (beta; will be pay-to-play later), Castle Infinity, Planetary Raiders (beta; will be pay-to-play later)

PAY:

Hover Race (shareware), Rolemaster: Magestorm, and Splatterball (part of Engage), Dark Suns (part of TEN), Legends of Kesmai (part of Aries), Meridian 59, Warbirds

The Future

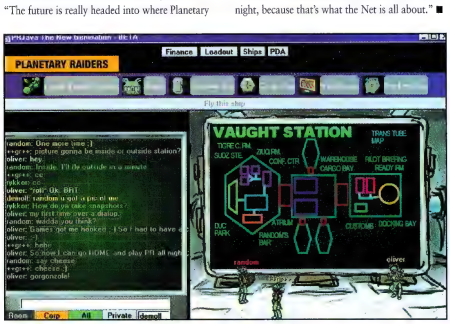
Clearly, online-only games are still at an early stage of development, and many of them seem more like experiments than anything else. As developers push the limits of current restraints, playability will continue to increase and games will continue to become more and more sophisticated. Are online games the direction the industry is heading into as we move into the next millennium? Developers are hedging their bets.

"In a multiplayer game, the storytelling style is very, very different than in solo play," says Garriott. "In the case of solo play, you can orchestrate something like a three-act play—a beginning where you introduce the characters, a middle where they try to accomplish some great goal together, and then a release where they've overcome their goals and talk about what they've learned on this journey. But since this sort of approach doesn't apply itself well to multiplayer, it's a very different kind of challenge. I am a devout believer that both solo and multiplayer games are here to stay."

Salinas is bullish on the online-only future: "The future is really headed into where Planetary Raiders is going. Warbirds can hold 200 players in one environment; Planetary Raiders has leaped beyond that technology, and now we can hook up 10, 20, hundreds of servers and have 10,000 people in one arena. Just think of these MUDs—we can have a graphical MUD with 10,000 people in 50 different cities. It's basically opening it up and having thousands of players in one environment able to talk to each other. That's where it's going."

"I think if you asked the product-development executives whether or not we should be committed to online gaming, everyone would answer very cautiously, 'Yes,'" Yates says. "What hasn't been proven by many companies out there is whether or not there is a sustainable business at this time. Many people are predicting that the business is many years away. We don't believe that; the team that is working on SubSpace really believes that it's all about the right product and really working hard to reduce the cost of the product, not making it pay-for-play. We do believe in the online market.

"It's a product-driven industry, and you have to have a compelling product. People have to be able to get at it, get into it, and be able to just jump in and have a good time at any point in time, day or night, because that's what the Net is all about." ■



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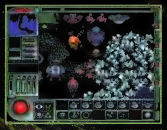

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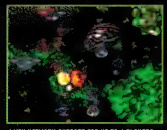

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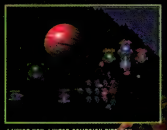
// BUILD ALLIANCES WITH ALIEN RACES AND LEARN THEIR TECHNOLOGIES



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GT Interactive Software

QUAKE 1.3

QUAKE'S EXPANDING UNIVERSE

PC Games has gone on a mission to unearth some of the myriad professional, retail Quake add-on packs and conversions that are hitting the market, and to check out a few of the Internet-based patches in development. Here's what we found.

Add-ons

By Christopher Tou, Rob Smith, and Peter Olafson

In its relatively short life, Quake has already earned one distinction: It's the most widely extended PC game ever. John Carmack and his team at id Software deliberately left the game architecture open, and scores of companies—not to mention hundreds, even thousands of bedroom game hackers—have responded with level add-ons and editors, skins, gameplay variations, and anything else they could think of. Hey, you've got to love a game that lets users plug in the likes of Henry Rollins as characters, eh? Anyway, here's a look at the most recent Quake mods out there—retail and Internet.

Quake Mission Pack No. 1: Scourge of Armagon

The pros go to work

From the level-designing experts at Hipnotic Interactive comes The Scourge of Armagon, an add-on consisting of 15 new single-player levels, a deathmatch level, two new critters, three new weapons, three new power-ups, a range of new well-considered environmental effects, and a new Quake executable (version 1.07).

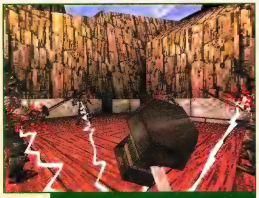
Where Quake levels can sometimes leave you shaken but not stirred, Scourge's game world comes off much better grounded. You'll find a pumping station on the first level (indeed, you'll have to blow up the pumps to finish), a working mine on the third (rolling rock zone), a research station on four (don't look in the basement), and many more.

Design is the key to Scourge's appeal, and the levels themselves are of classic construction: solid without feeling mundane; clever without being annoying; and large without unneeded sprawl.

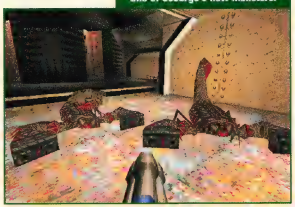
But the other additions to the Quake canon are sensible and occasionally Duke-ish: proximity mines, weapon-swiping Gremlins, the ability to set off explosions that alter the environment. The new laser cannon cuts through enemies like paper, and Thor's Hammer is a blast—literally. You'll enjoy some of the new powerups, too, including a horn that summons a random creature to defend you.

Two gripes: The game seemed oddly slow to save under DOS. Also, running under Windows 95 on a Pentium MMX 200, Scourge consistently quit to the desktop after the second level.

But, hey, you can't blame it: Level three's really spooky.



When struck on the ground, the Hammer shoots out lightning in all directions.



One of Scourge's new monsters.

SCOURGE OF ARMAGON

- **Developer:** Hipnotic Interactive
- **Publisher:** Activision, 800-477-3650, www.activision.com
- **Street Price:** $30

RATING: A-

Tremor

Comprehensive Quake companion

Most of these 1,000 (yep, 1,000) levels and add-ons have been taken from a variety of sites on the Net, but more than 200 have been created expressly for this package. Presented through a simple, functional Win 95 interface, many of the quirks and command-line requirements needed to apply patches, levels and mods to your Quake games are bypassed with a simple double-click. Also, there's a function in the interface to link the levels, saving you the aggravation of having to quit from the game to launch a new level.

The levels vary in quality, ranging from extremely good to pretty dire, but with the hundreds available, there's something there to suit every taste. A particular style did seem to emerge over some of the levels—fairly open rooms packed with monsters—but those don't do justice to Quake's 3D engine, which is capable of so much more inventiveness.

Where Aftershock highlighted a few high-quality, hugely playable levels, Tremor is more of a quantity deal. There really is a lot packed in here, with the patches, level editors, and mods being the most useful. It's a decent purchase if you want to save all the download-time.

TREMOR

- **Publisher:** Head Games Publishing, 612-321-9470, www.bpsi.net/headgames
- **Street Price:** $30

RATING: B

Q2

Not one of the best

This levels-only compilation employs a user-friendly Windows front-end that lets you select any of the 100 new levels with the click of a button; a crude-looking bitmap serves as a preview for each level. We were excited as anyone about the prospect of more original levels that had never been seen before, even on the Net. Sadly, most of Q2's levels are of the square-rooms-connected-to-narrow-hallways variety, all taking place on one floor. Also, the levels aren't linked, meaning you have to quit in and out to launch each new one. Too much work for too little payoff.

Q2

- **Developer:** Underworld Software
- **Publisher:** MicroStar Software, 800-777-4228, www.microstar-usa.com
- **Street Price:** $20

RATING: D+

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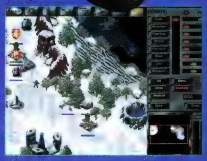

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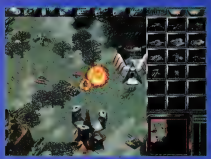

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Add-ons

An all-new grunt appears in Q!ZONE.

Shrak's new Zed monster, ready to eat laser fire.

Shrak

The first total conversion

Many "total conversions" for Quake have been promised, but few have materialized. Shrak, the first to make it to retail, includes 9 new weapons and monsters, 19 new "linked" levels, several deathmatch levels, an original storyline(!), and new sound effects and soundtrack. It even includes two special Capture-the-Flag levels, with a bug-war mode where you battle it out looking like a scorpion or a spider.

Shrak falls short of making you think you're playing a different game, but it does a fairly decent job of adding replay value. Good effort.

SHRAK

- **Publisher:** Quantum Axcess
  800-867-4890
  www.shrak.com
- **Street Price:** $20

RATING: B-

Q!ZONE

Cheap and effective

Continuing its tradition of compiling add-ons for various popular games, WizardWorks has jumped on the Quake bandwagon. Q!ZONE is a complete three-episode replacement for Quake. Not only are the levels fairly well-designed, making full use of the true 3D engine, but Q!ZONE also includes a new weapon—a ninja star—and a few new monsters. You also get a level and map manager, allowing you to easily launch the various Quake add-ons. While it isn't perfect, it is useful if you really hate the DOS command prompt.

Q!ZONE

- **Publisher:** WizardWorks
  800-229-2714
  www.wizworks.com
- **Street Price:** $20

RATING: B-

Aftershock Toolbox

Do-it-yourself

Think the Quake monsters are too dumb? The levels too poorly designed? Think you could do better? Head Games' new Aftershock Toolbox has all the tools you'll ever need to change virtually any aspect of Quake's adjustable settings. From level editors to Quake C compilers, it has all of the best utilities around, allowing you to build your own partial or total conversions.

Though most of the utilities can be found on the Net (and by the time you read this, some of them will have already been replaced by newer versions), the Toolbox gives you a complete set of tools on one accessible CD. This is certainly a must-have for "true" Quake players who'd like to offer their own take on the whole Quake experience.

AFTERSHOCK TOOLBOX

- **Publisher:** Head Games Publishing
  612-321-9470
  www.bpsi.net/headgames.com
- **Street Price:** $20

RATING: B

Deathmatch Maker

Drag-and-drop simplicity

Virtus' Deathmatch Maker is the level editor authorized by id Software. Built for designers of all experience, it's one of the easiest-to-use editors thus far. The tool has your normal 2D view—top, front, and left—all packed into one window; with the click of a button, you can switch to any of these angles. However, you also get a real-time 3D view, and this is where Virtus' experience in real-time 3D applications really shows. This 3D "Walk" view lets you walk through your level in real time with all the textures in place, unlike the widely used freeware beta Thred utility, which uses only generic colors. With this Walk view, you almost play your level without having to go through the common cycle of build, export, test, build, export, and test some more.

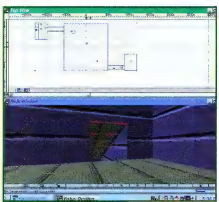
Creating a level is as simple as drag-and-drop. Beginners can drag a template of a ready-made room, then use the current textures, or drag-and-drop their favorite self-made texture onto the surface of their choice. Drag-and-drop weapons, ammo, and health, add monsters, and voilà! A playable level.

Deathmatch Maker was also designed with advanced users in mind: it lets you add new monsters or build levels designed for Capture-the-Flag. This application is powerful, yet easy to use; any aspiring level builders will be able to put it to good use once they've adjusted to the slow loading of templates.

DEATHMATCH MAKER

- **Publisher:** Virtus Corporation
  www.virtus.com
  www.deathmatchmaker.com
- **Street Price:** $29

RATING: B+

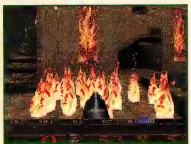


Create your own levels with Deathmatch Maker.

Internet-based conversions

You guys have been busy out there! Here's a look at some Net-based freeware mods:

Team Fortress Quake



Pyros lay walls of fire to roast snipers in Team Fortress.

Possibly the best current conversion, Team Fortress is designed for cooperative team capture-the-flag and straight up deathmatch play. It features seven different character classes—scout, sniper, soldier, demolition man, combat medic, heavy weapons guy, and pyro—all sporting their own abilities. Mixing the classes through teams adds great strategy and the need for cohesive planning to the usual frenzied deathmatch activity.

TF is constantly being updated to include excellent ideas such as the President's patch, which matches teams of assassins and presidential bodyguards while the ax-wielding Chief Exec travels from Point A to B. Find out more at **http://www.telefragged.com/teamfortress.**

An actual screen of a new Alien.

Alien Quake

The *Alien* conversion for Doom was certainly one of the best, and the powerful storyline and frightening monsters make it an ideal candidate for Quake conversion treatment. All the monsters from the movies are included, as well as a story that incorporates the *Nostromo* and the LV-426 prison colony. A suitably epic final confrontation with a hideous Queen Alien should capture some attention when this conversion is completed. Find out the latest details on its planned release at **http://www.electricpages.com/tmin/grievence/quake.html.**

QuakeRally

QuakeRally: Destruction Derby with guns.

Mix the death and destruction of Quake and the heavy weaponry of Twisted Metal 2, throw in a dash of multiplayer Mario Kart 64, and what do you get? QuakeRally. This total conversion comes complete with in-air rolls, skidding, sliding, first-person in-car view, third person chase-cam view, on-vehicle mounted weapons, different car skins, jumps over lakes and lava, new tracks (levels), and three different gameplay modes: pure racing (no weapons), deathmatch, and racing deathmatch (first to finish line, but with weapons). This "in progress" conversion looks like it'll be one of the best. Check it out at **http://www.frag.com/quakerally.**

New World Disorder: The Quake Cyberpunk TC

Storm the field in Quake Soccer.

A futuristic setting and detailed storyline is slowly developing at **http://www.uk.digiserve.com/whiteoak/punktc.**

Terminator Quake

You all know the movies. The conversion is making progress, with beta versions of some of the weapons available for download at **http://www.planetquake.com/quakex/termquake.**

Quake Soccer

Fancy a kick around? Try out the developing beta of this sports mod at **http://www.introl.com/~jebs/.**

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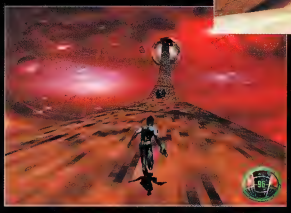

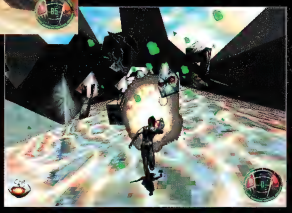

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PC CD-ROM

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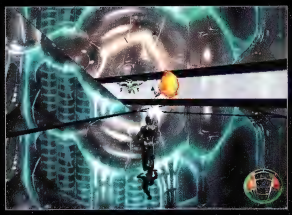

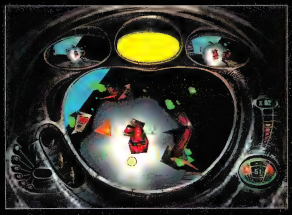

Your planet is being bulldozed by the ton. Alien controlled mobile mining cities are strip-mining the earth's surface overrunning and crushing anything in their path…Unless you can stop them.

BATTLE TO SAVE IT WILL BEGIN SOON.

- Fully 3-D rendered graphics unlike anything you have ever before seen.
- Over 60 arenas spread out over 6 cities.
- Never before seen "sniper mode" that allows you to zoom in on the enemy and pick it off with astounding accuracy.
- The most sophisticated enemy artificial intelligence ever created. Fully reactive "smart enemies" think, listen, and communicate in a calculated assault on your life.
- An arsenal of totally innovative weapons and equipment including:
  - A helmet-mounted sniper rifle that targets enemies from over two miles away.
  - A living polymer suit that protects from piercing projectiles.
  - A high-tech reusable parachute.
  - Bombs... decoys... homing sniper grenades... and many more.
- Two styles of adrenaline-pumping game dynamics featuring first and third person point of view.

IT THINKS. THEREFORE IT KILLS.

Windows '95 and DOS

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Shiny Entertainment

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PLAYMATES INTERACTIVE ENTERTAINMENT PIE

Twinsen's Odyssey

By Daniel Morris

Praised by critics, a sleeper on the shelves, Relentless: Twinsen's Adventure never quite got the attention it deserved in the U.S. See how the sequel is shaping up to be a beautiful, engaging, imaginative adventure game—one you won't want to miss this time around.

America never really got to see what the Relentless: Twinsen's Adventure phenomenon was all about, as the French-made game was not aggressively marketed to American gamers. Activision has determined that 1997 will not be like 1994: Adeline Software's follow-up to its critically acclaimed adventure game has been snapped up by the game-industry giant, and it's going to get the marketing push it deserves. Gamers who hear the title Twinsen's Odyssey for the first time may wonder, "What game?" but they won't for long.

Twinsen's Odyssey is a visual treasure. Set in a surreal alien world, it sends its curious little hero off to find out why his planet's magicians are being kidnapped. You steer Twinsen through his vast homeland, chatting up the citizens, garnering clues, and eventually glomming on to a frightening alien invasion.

There's no shortage of awesome sights awaiting Twinsen on his journey across his magical planet. This sphinx requires the correct answer to a riddle before Twinsen is allowed to pass.

The game places 3D characters and objects into pre-rendered background screens, and the action flows *seamlessly*. It's often impossible to tell what is being rendered on the fly and what is merely static artwork: the environments function so smoothly and so dynamically that they become indistinguishable from the animated objects on the screen.

Every detail of the game's visual presentation is arresting. Weather effects seem to blow rain diagonally through the scene, beginning over the gamer's left shoulder and proceeding to a point of termination deep within the screen. Movement through foreground and background is accomplished with cinematic sweep and flair.

Gamers who recognize a striking similarity between the visual style of Twinsen's Odyssey and Time Commando will not be far off the mark; both games share the design talents of artistic director Frederick Raynal (who also gave us the look of Alone in the Dark). The cinematic feel of both games is very much the same, as are the convincing effects Adeline used to render animated action in the pre-rendered environments.

But the real joy of Twinsen's Odyssey is our discovery that this brilliant visual presentation is all working in the service of a charming fantasy. It's been a few years since Twinsen was called upon by the citizens of Twinsun (our hero's planet and his namesake) to save them from the scurrilous Dr. FunFrock. Peace and harmony, not to mention great weather, have reigned on Twinsun ever since.

TWINSEN'S ODYSSEY

DEVELOPER:	Adeline Software International
PUBLISHER:	Activision 800-477-3650 www.activision.com
PLATFORM:	DOS/Win 95 CD
AVAILABLE:	May 1997

SEE MORE ONLINE
http://www.pcgames.com

Ask advice of anyone and anything. Who knows when a friendly water dragon might offer you some helpful hints?

Not every creature in Twinsun is friendly. Our hero has to get physical to protect himself from this ape's animosity.

The countryside harbors a number of towns and villages. Stop by and spend some of your cash at the numerous stores, and converse with the townspeople to learn more about Twinsun.

Heads up! The parachuting, militaristic Sausage People don't take kindly to trespassers, no matter how noble their intentions.

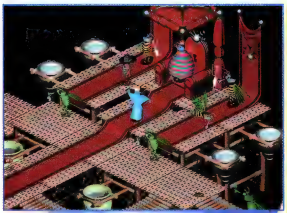
Now, a new and even more dire threat to the planet's sanguine existence has reared its ugly head. Aliens called the Esmers have descended from the stars to wreak havoc, turning the weather into a never-ending storm and thus cutting off all transit between the islands that make up Twinsun's geography. On top of this inconvenience to industry and traffic, many of the islands' creatures need nice weather to stay healthy, and when the benevolent dinosaur Dino-Fly takes ill, his friend Twinsen decides it's time to get involved.

Twinsen's quest to stop the Esmers and their leader, the Dark Monk, will take him from island to island, beginning with a mission to find a cure for Dino-Fly's ailment and then to rid Twinsun of the Esmers altogether. The game is played with a very simple interface, consisting of the usual move, talk, search, and take commands familiar to adventure games.

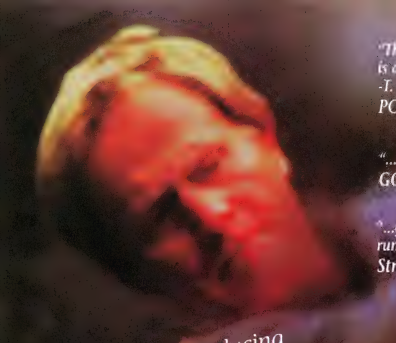
But Twinsen's Odyssey also allows the player to give Twinsen one of four different postures—normal, athletic, aggressive, and discreet. You select these postures on the fly as the situation calls for them, and they affect your ability to solve challenges. To run past a cluster of claw-snapping crabs, you may want to get athletic and jump by them. To defend yourself against a gorilla's charge, you may want to "go aggro" and fight him toe-to-toe. Or you may need to do a little tip-toeing around an Esmer spaceship, which would call for a click of the discreet button.

All of these postures are animated splendidly, with Twinsen adopting the respective physical traits. Character animations throughout the game continually surprise and delight, as all manner of bizarre Twinsun residents display uncannily accurate reactions and movements.

This is a game we're eagerly looking forward to in its finished version. The original Twinsen's Adventure was one of the more unappreciated games of its day outside of Europe, and Activision would be wise to keep its impressive sequel from suffering the same fate. With dazzling graphics and creative design, Twinsen's Odyssey looks poised to join The Neverhood as one of the most significant achievements in adventure gaming in a long time. ■



Throughout the game, Twinsen is called on to persuade powerful figures to pitch in to help the cause. Here, he seeks an audience with the queen of an island swarm.



"The Course Designer is a landmark!"
-T. Liam McDonald
PC Gamer

"...impressive..."
GOLFWEEK

"...gives Links LS a run for its money."
Strategy Plus

"A truly revolutionary product. Links finally has some stiff competition. A Course Designer so easy to use, that you'll quickly find yourself addicted. 16.7 million colors with one major improvement: virtually no redraw wait."
Computer and Net Player

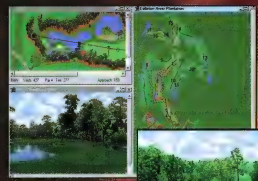
"...promises to be among the greatest achievements yet on the electronic links."
PC Games

introducing

Jack Nicklaus 4

Featuring *Colleton River Plantation, Country Club of the South, Muirfield Village, Cabo del Sol,* and *Winding Springs.*

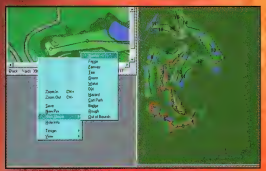
The Course Designer



This is the Course Designer that created all 5 Nicklaus-designed courses in the game!

Use the Designer to re-create your favorite course! Import, modify, and play courses from previous Nicklaus games!

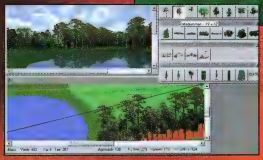
Input the basic details of a course from a real scorecard–the "Wizard" automatically routes each hole.



Choose from a variety of templates, or create your own shapes. Changing terrain is as easy as click-and-drag.

Click and drag on its shape

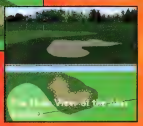
The result: a new bunker



"Is it live or is it...?" Our Course Designer is so true-to-life, it's hard to tell the difference!

This image is of the 3rd Green at Country Club of the South. The left half of the image is from the Course Designer; the right half of the image is an actual photo.

Choose from over 100 different types of trees, bushes, rocks, and other objects!

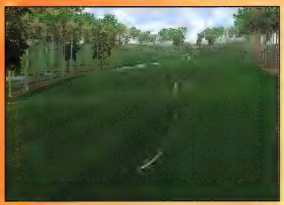


Fly Thru View of the Holes

From Tee to Green

The Tee Shot

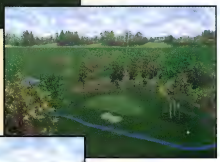
Pop-up displays are optional–leave them off for the purest golfing experience.



The fastest screen redraw times on the PC allow the camera to automatically switch to the landing in full-screen, from varying viewpoints!

The Approach Shot

New "Intensity Control™" reproduces the dynamics that shape the shot. "Club up and swing easy" for control or a low trajectory; "swing hard" when you want spin and distance.



Every shot flies, bounces, and rolls true to the game, with the best ball physics model in existence. Courses are accurate to within 6 inches!

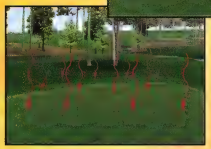
Multiplayer play is fully supported, including recorded rounds, shared keyboard, serial, modem, LAN and Internet play.

Weather can change in the middle of the round, and natural wind variations and every possible turf condition add to the challenge!

Around The Green

Our new approach makes putting more realistic. Mow lines on the green help you read the contour.

Separate chipping and putting meters maximize control around the green.

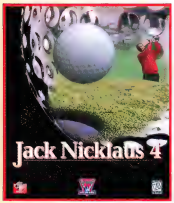


For enhanced gameplay, this optional grid floats down and drapes itself over the green, clearly showing all high and low spots.

Look for the Jack Nicklaus 4 playable demos in select magazines, online at **http://www.accolade.com** *or at your local retailer.*

For hints and tips on Accolade products, call Accolade Direct 1-900-454-HINT. $0.99/minute. If you are under 18, please get your parents' permission before making this call.

Call 1–800–245–7744 to order direct



PC CD-ROM WINDOWS 95

SOLO PLUS

ACCOLADE

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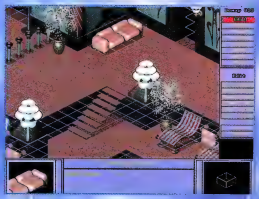
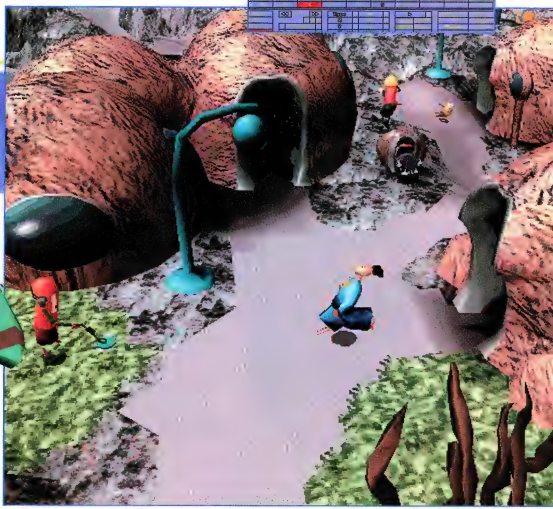
It ain't easy getting around the islands. Numerous perils await the unwary pedestrian, including unstable bridges that require precise timing to cross. One false step, and you're chasm fodder.



The environment editor at work in the construction of a hotel. This is where the designers place SVGA-rendered objects into the 3D environment.

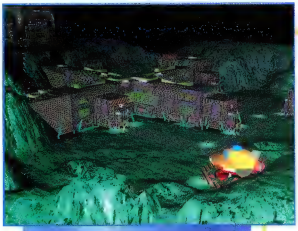
The walrus is Paul. Actually, the walrus is in an early stage of development at Adeline Software. Note the progression of animation elements across the bottom of the screen.



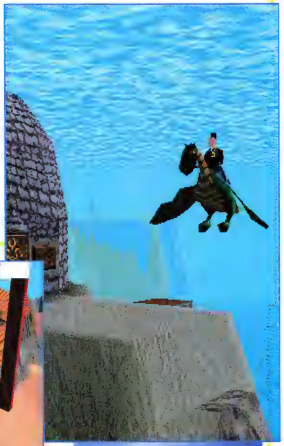
Every screen holds priceless details to savor; notice the Sausage Person hunting coins. Each village is a little crazier than the one before it, and each is more stubborn about giving up useful clues.

A good development-stage look at the making of a transit depot. Polygonal objects such as Twinsen and the skimmer are assembled in the scene in three dimensions.

The command room of the Esmer spaceship. Are these the fiends responsible for Twinsun's troubles? Or are they simply underlings of the insidious Dark Monk?



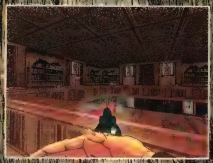
The final showdown looms as Twinsen discovers the secret compound of the evil Esmers.



...you guessed it: your very own dragon! Twinsun's geography is based around islands, and inter-island transportation will fast become a necessity, so anything that will help shuttle you around is a good find.

The race is on as Twinsen commandeers a race buggy. Among the various modes of transportation Twinsen can take advantage of are this car, boats, planes, spaceships, and even...

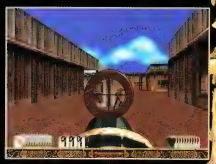
The Most Dangerous Man is the One with Nothing Left to Lose.



When outlaws murdered your wife, and took your daughter, everything you had was gone. Your gut aches for blood and sweet revenge.
Dyin's too good for 'em now.

Ride back into the wild west as the gun-slinging Marshall James Anderson. You'll encounter a dusty town, an abandoned mine, a runaway train, and the orneriest cowpokes this side of the Mississippi as you uncover a twisted plot of greed and corruption.

With weapons like your .45 six-shooter, your .44 rifle, your 10-gauge shotgun and your good ol' sawed off 12-gauge you'll be packin' plenty of fire power. Nothing warms the heart of a cold-blooded killer like hot lead.



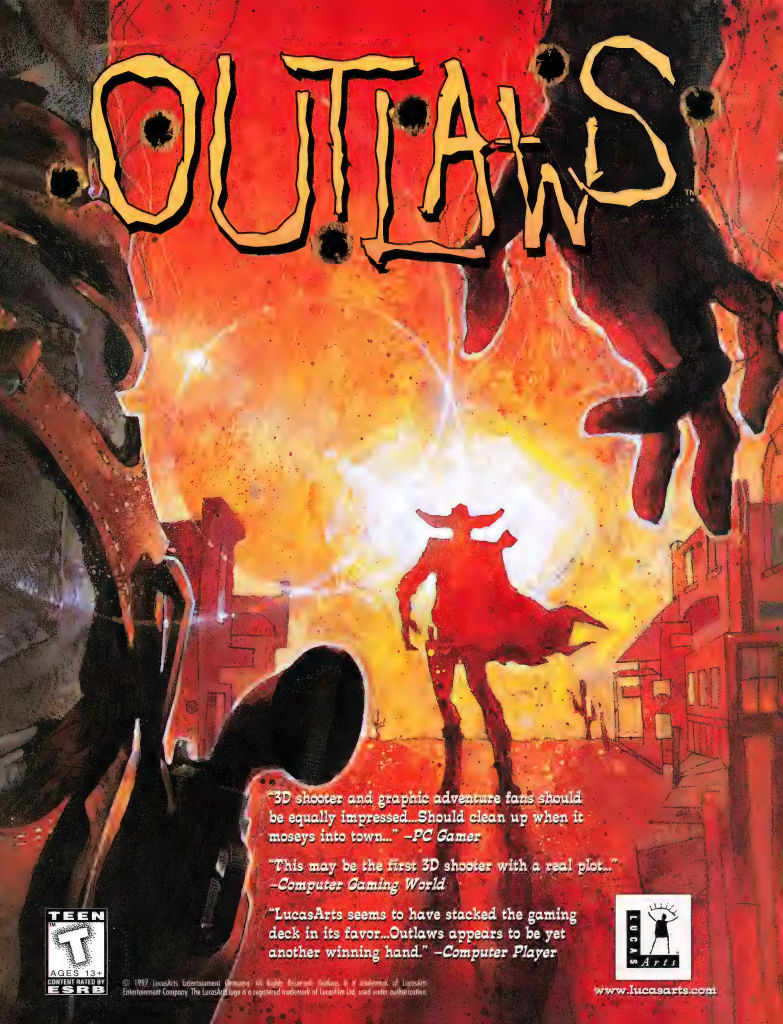
It's Payback Time.

OUTLAWS™

Three Game Variations
- Spaghetti Western Shooter
- Bounty Hunter Action
- Multiplayer Shootouts

Challenges the wit as well the trigger finger – Shooting the civilians may leave you swinging from a rope.

Multiplayer Games – Supports 2 to 8 players over modem, network or Internet. Form your own gang and hit the trail.



"3D shooter and graphic adventure fans should be equally impressed...Should clean up when it moseys into town..." –*PC Gamer*

"This may be the first 3D shooter with a real plot..." –*Computer Gaming World*

"LucasArts seems to have stacked the gaming deck in its favor...Outlaws appears to be yet another winning hand." –*Computer Player*

TEEN
T
AGES 13+
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

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LUCAS Arts

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Epic MegaGames is out to prove the first-person action genre is far from dried up with its technologically sexy shooter. *PC Games* braved the cold confines of the Great White North to bring you the most comprehensive info to date on what could be the first true Quake killer—and the hottest game of '97.

UNREAL

By Steve Klett

"Quake killer." The very notion of such a game sends shivers up any gamer's spine.

The possibility of a game that looks better, sounds better, and plays better than id's hot first-person shooter is almost too good to believe. Of course, gamers have heard it all before from a list of long-forgotten companies that claimed their products were "Doom killers." So the natural tendency is to think: "Quake killer? Yeah, right—tell me another one."

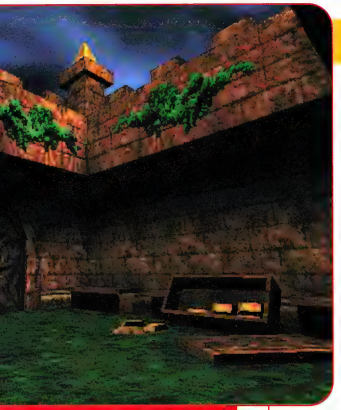
Duke Nukem 3D and Dark Forces are arguably the only games that could give the Doomers a run for their money. Duke's popularity even comes close to Quake's; alas, the game falls short in the technical category. Granted, Quake was only released late last year, but no game has yet to appear that can compete on a level playing field with id's brainchild.

That may be about to change. Epic MegaGames has been lurking in the shadows, waiting for its chance to pounce from its relatively small-time shareware origins—Raptor, Fire Fight, Jazz Jackrabbit—onto the market with a not-so-little game called Unreal.

PC Games left the sunny haven of its California offices and braved the treacherous climate of our northern neighbor to visit the Unreal development team at one of Epic's satellite offices near Toronto. The game was just hitting alpha stage and was really starting to show its enormous potential.

SEE MORE ONLINE
http://www.pcgames.com

UNREAL
THE STORY



In the final game, this gold won't be laying around unguarded, you can be sure about that.

"We're looking to create the coolest 3D shooter ever," designer/producer Cliff Bleszinski says without a hint of modesty, and from what *PC Games* has seen so far, Epic is definitely on the right track.

As for reports of the stagnation of the first-person shooter genre in some enthusiast magazines, Epic thinks such assumptions are, shall we say, premature. "There's lots of room for advance in first-person games," says Bleszinski. "The genre is only going to progress through people taking risks, which we are—but there are far too many talented people out there for the genre to stagnate."

Gameplay, AI, and network support were beginning to fall into place at the time of our visit, and the team's energy level was sky-high as, top-to-bottom, they seemed to know they were onto something truly special. Unreal's shareware version should be available to the public in June, at which time you can judge for yourself whether id's dominance is at an end. In the meantime, whet your appetite with the most comprehensive Unreal story to date, including exclusive information on the backstory, Internet play, weapons, creatures, and the Unreal editor.

AS NEARLY EVERYONE WHO'S PLAYED FIRST-PERSON ACTION GAMES LIKE THE DOOMS, RISE OF THE TRIAD, DUKE 3D, AND QUAKE KNOWS, THE GAMES' BACKSTORIES ARE NEARLY ALWAYS AN AFTERTHOUGHT—PARTICULARLY WITH ID'S RELEASES. Sure, the main draw for an action game is the action, but all the mayhem is meaningless without a reason for being there.

Epic is well aware of this shortcoming, and is taking great pains to develop a plausible, enticing story to further immerse you in Unreal's game environment. So far they've been tight-lipped about the plot, but with the help of a little whiskey (remember, it's cold up there), we got them to open up. (Elements of the story are, however, subject to change by the time the game ships.)

As it stands, you're a prisoner aboard a transport ship that crashes upon a mysterious alien planet, tentatively called Gryphon. Of course, you alone survive the crash. You scavenge a weapon out of the ship's wreckage and begin to explore.

The first sight to greet your eyes is that of a particularly nasty-looking alien beast snacking on the entrails of one of your former cellblock buddies. Yes, this alien world you've landed on is not the friendliest place in the universe.

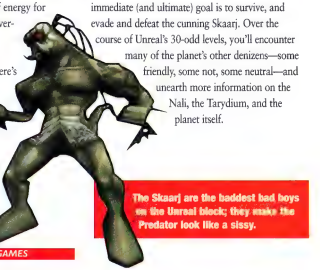
It turns out that this planet is home to huge deposits of a relatively rare element called Tarydium, the primary source of energy for civilized species everywhere, powering everything from starships to microwaves. (Don't worry, this ain't Command & Conquer: There's no mining required in Unreal.) As you'd expect, Tarydium has been overused to the point that it has become rare to find in quantity and, therefore, is exceedingly expensive.

Tarydium has strong electromagnetic properties that can wreak havoc with the navigational systems of passing starships. Indeed, the vast quantities of Tarydium on Gryphon have made the planet a sort of Bermuda Triangle, and the place has remained largely undiscovered as a result.

A peaceful race of creatures known as the Nali has called Gryphon home for centuries. Over the years, they've erected enormous cities and castles that served as habitat, fortresses, and mining colonies. The Nali managed to exist in relative anonymity and internal harmony until the Skaarj—a vicious alien race with serious bloodlust—crash-landed on the planet long before your arrival. The Skaarj (pronounced "scar") quickly hunted down and enslaved the Nali, and any other creatures unlucky enough to cross their path are hunted for sport. They also like to use live subjects to test the effectiveness of their battle skills and weapons.

The Quad shocker is one of several weapons being considered for the final game.

The beast you encounter upon leaving the wreckage of your prison ship is none other than a Skaarj—and you're next on its dinner menu. Your immediate (and ultimate) goal is to survive, and evade and defeat the cunning Skaarj. Over the course of Unreal's 30-odd levels, you'll encounter many of the planet's other denizens—some friendly, some not, some neutral—and unearth more information on the Nali, the Tarydium, and the planet itself.



The Skaarj are the baddest bad boys on the Unreal block; they make the Predator look like a sissy.

Today...
I will fortify my island.

I will...
annihilate opposing forces.

I will...
rule the skies.

This Summer, real-time action-strategy reaches new heights — with groundbreaking Internet warfare.

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UNREAL

THE CHARACTERS

Not only will you have to fight airborne creatures, but you'll be able to morph into them as well in both the stand-alone and multiplayer games.

So who exactly are you, the hero, in Unreal? Well, final details weren't nailed down, but you can choose to play as either a male or female character. What's also clear is that no matter which you choose, you'll be tough as nails—a hard-bitten criminal who would make even Duke and those anonymous space marines think twice about messing with you.

You'll run into two-gun-toting Brutes all over the place. Don't stand and gawk, unless you want to die.

Now for the big news, which has major gameplay implications: Epic plans to give you the ability to morph into four different creatures! You heard us right, four different forms—one for basic flying, one for swimming, a huge one for bashing, and a tiny flying one for hiding and navigating tricky spots. You won't be able to switch among your various forms on the fly; rather, you'll need to find "morphing stations" that are spread among the levels to make a change. (For some reason "Wonder Twin powers—activate!" comes to mind.)

The character morphing holds obvious potential for puzzle-solving in the stand-alone game. But think of the multiplayer possibilities: switching to a flying beast and swooping down on your unsuspecting opponents from a secluded rafter in the dark recesses of a level—cool!

"We want to keep players on the edge of their seats with suspense—we want to damage them psychologically."

Cliff Bleszinski
Designer/Producer
Epic MegaGames

THE TECHNOLOGY

Remember how Doom dazzled you? Remember how much Duke's speed and realistic environments impressed you? Then Quake came along and stunned you with its technical merits. Now, Unreal stands poised to take the next turn at upping the technical ante in the genre (the possible exception being Jedi Knight, which could be out by the time you read this).

Unreal is based on one of the most sophisticated 3D engines we've ever seen. The game will run at high resolutions in 16-bit color with real-time multiple light sourcing (weapon effects, pulsing and flickering lights, etc.) that just has to be seen to be appreciated for what it does to enhance mood, immersion, and realism. All this on a P133 with 16MB to 32MB of RAM! If you've got a lower-end machine and need to run in the default 320-by-200 resolution, it's not the end of the world—the game will still look fantastic.

Those of you who've shelled out for an MMX-enabled Pentium machine will be in for some extra treats: 24-bit color, blended lighting effects, and some texture smoothing. MMX won't necessarily speed up the game, but it will give you more eye candy.

3Dfx owners can expect some gifts of their own, because Epic plans to support the Voodoo 3D accelerator chipset. An early version of Unreal enhanced for 3Dfx boards was running during our visit and looked stunning. However, the board's main boon is not really looks—the game looks fantastic even when it's unaccelerated—but speed. According to Tim Sweeney, lead programmer on the project, Unreal will run in 640-by-480 at 30 to 35 frames per second on the 3Dfx "without breaking a sweat."

As for the levels themselves, we think they feature the best 3D architecture and the most realistic textures yet seen on the PC—just check out the screens and see if you don't agree. On top of the 30-plus levels in the single-player game, there will be a crop of multiplayer-only levels (more on that in a bit). You'll find bridges, catwalks, and rooms-above-rooms galore; a mixture of indoor and outdoor levels; and levels in disparate crashed spacecraft that will lend a nice variety to the game.

The textures and lighting effects will take your breath away. They're almost too pretty to shoot up—almost.

ATOMIC BOMBERMAN
"The Best Multiplayer Game Ever"
Next Generation March Cover Story
"It Will Rock"
Electronic Gaming Monthly
"Editors' Top Ten"
Ultra Game Players
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UNREAL

THE INTELLIGENCE

OF COURSE, ALL THIS TECHNICAL MUMBO-JUMBO, THE BACKSTORY, AND THE WONDERFUL 3D ENVIRONMENT DON'T MEAN A THING IF A GAME'S NOT BACKED BY STRONG ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE THAT CAN ENSURE A SOLID SINGLE-PLAYER EXPERIENCE.

As the popularity of multiplayer and Internet fragfests continues to grow, it is easy for developers to overlook the solo-play aspects of a game, which is unfortunate, as they are still extremely important.

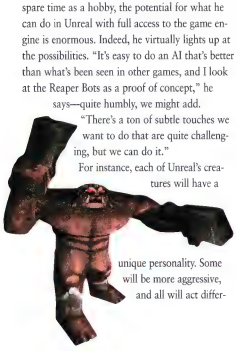
Epic hasn't lost sight of this fact. Indeed, the company was so unhappy with its own attempts at creating a realistic, challenging AI for Unreal's baddies that it went out and secured the considerable talents of one Steven Polge, a former IBM employee who is legendary among the legions of Quake addicts for creating the Reaper Bots—incredibly challenging, computer-controlled deathmatch opponents for use in Quake. (If you haven't tried 'em, you should. You can download them at our Web site, **www.pcgames.com**.)

Polge says he was disappointed with the quality of the AI that he found in Quake's monsters, so he designed the Reaper Bots to simulate a multiplayer deathmatch on a solitary PC. The Bots remain one of the most popular Quake modification downloads to date.

Given that Polge created the Reaper Bots in his spare time as a hobby, the potential for what he can do in Unreal with full access to the game engine is enormous. Indeed, he virtually lights up at the possibilities. "It's easy to do an AI that's better than what's been seen in other games, and I look at the Reaper Bots as a proof of concept," he says—quite humbly, we might add.

"There's a ton of subtle touches we want to do that are quite challenging, but we can do it."

For instance, each of Unreal's creatures will have a unique personality. Some will be more aggressive, and all will act differently in different parts of a level and in different situations. An enemy may run away from you if injured, or run away unhurt only to return with some friends to gang up on you. Enemies will also be able to learn the levels and your fighting style, and they will adjust to the way you play and use this knowledge against you. Better yet, they'll be smart enough to take cover when you fire at them, a shortcoming Polge finds particularly frustrating in other games.



To top it off, your enemies will be able to communicate with each other in the game to coordinate how to kill you in the most efficient manner. You'll hear creatures such as the Skaarj bark out orders to each other in their alien tongue as they stalk you.

"We want to keep players on the edge of their seat with suspense—we want to damage them psychologically," Blesznski says, only half-jokingly. "The intelligence of the creatures is vital in accomplishing this."

The level of the enemies' AI will also play a role in puzzle-solving. Sure, you can just try the Stallone approach and go into every scenario with guns blazing, but if you take the time to survey a given situation and think it out, you may find an easier route to advance. For example, you may encounter a group of Skaarj guarding an artifact that you need to get to the next level. You're low on health and ammo, and surviving a direct encounter isn't likely. Suddenly, you remember a group of Slith you encountered earlier and left alive. Perhaps you can lure the Slith within the Skaarj's vicinity, get them to duke it out, and creep in and steal the artifact unscathed.

Due to the extremely high polygon count of most of the enemies (they average around 400), you won't often find a ton of bad guys on the screen at once. However, Polge says the enemies' AI will be at a high enough level that you won't notice. For instance, you may be on a level with only six enemies, which creates a deathmatch style of play. Hopefully, those enemies will be so lifelike that it's hard to predict what they'll do next, making it that much harder to kill them.

The Unreal team promises the Skaarj in particular will pose a significant challenge in the single-player game. "The Skaarj will put the smack-dab on your ass," Blesznski says confidently.

Of course, Polge is working on different types of highly intelligent bots to include for deathmatches, single play, and multiplayer cooperative games as well.

THE WEAPONS

NOT MUCH INFORMATION WAS AVAILABLE ON UNREAL'S WEAPONS WHEN THIS STORY WENT TO PRESS, as they are likely to keep changing as Epic works on various play-balancing issues. However, at the very least, it's clear Epic is intent on providing an arsenal of strictly non-traditional weaponry. "THERE WILL BE NO SHOTGUN OR DOUBLE-BARRELED SHOTGUN," Blesznski states quite emphatically.

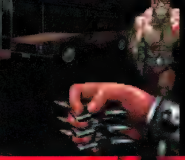
Epic plans to provide at least eight weapons, most of which will have secondary firing options. The basic weapon, the Automag, will be a modified pistol that can be fired traditionally or sideways, "gangsta-style." The Stinger will shoot shards of Tarydium crystals that'll make whatever is unfortunate enough to stand in your way glow with volatility and explode if jostled a bit. The longer you hold the trigger, the more powerful the impact.

The company is also considering a rocket launcher/grenade launcher–type weapon that will shoot multiple projectiles, depending on how long you hold down the trigger. Quickly press the trigger to fire one rocket or grenade; hold it down for a few seconds to fire six or eight projectiles at once. Hold the trigger even longer, and you may be able to lock onto your target; of course, the longer you wait to fire, the better your chances of dying. A nasty weapon that fires circular projectiles resembling sawblades is also a possibility.

The Automag is the weapon you start out with. It's basically a pistol, but it can be fired two ways.

The Stinger fires shards of Tarydium crystals.

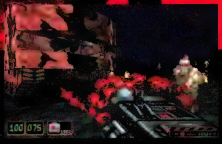
Twinkle twinkle little star...



Can Shadow Warrior kick ass? Shuriken! The silent assassin will emerge from the shadows by the light of his Uzi. Bodies will drop like lotus blossoms. Spent cartridges will fall like ripe cherries from the tree. Flesh will return to Nothingness. The Yin of Death and the Yang of Life balanced in the hands of one sick ninja puppy. Meditate. Annihilate. Meditate. Mutilate. Meditate. Detonate. Shadow Warrior. Reach for the stars.

This one's a no-brainer.

A barrel rampage in rooms-over-rooms.



Tanks. Joyride 'em or trash 'em!

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UNREAL

THE EDITOR

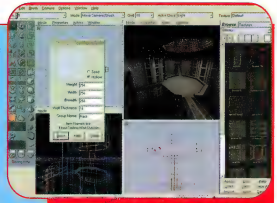
PERHAPS THE BEST NEWS FOR ALL OF YOU BUDDING LEVEL DESIGNERS OUT THERE IS THAT UNREAL WILL SHIP WITH A LEVEL EDITOR THAT WILL ALLOW YOU TO CREATE YOUR OWN SOPHISTICATED 3D LEVELS RELATIVELY EASILY. Those of you who've fooled around with the various Quake editors know what a pain it can be to create realistic 3D environments. Unreal's editor will really make it simple.

The Unreal editor is based on what Sweeney calls "constructive solid geometry," which basically means you construct levels with large pre-formed shapes instead of polygons and vertices, as in Quake. A level starts out as a huge solid shape that you virtually carve out to create rooms.

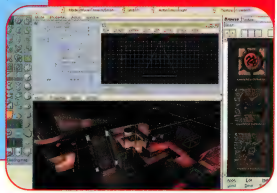
The editor has a slick graphical interface that shows your 3D level in real time with an overhead 2D view. Located to the sides of the level are toolbars with icons for textures and "brushes," which are pre-formed shapes that you can insert in the game at will. Epic will provide all the brushes and textures used in Unreal in a separate product after the game's release. However, the initial game release will include a shareware edition of the editor with a limited number of brushes and texture palettes.

We sat down with the editor and, with a little coaching from map designer Jeremy War, had a cool-looking level with complex doors and ceilings going in a matter of minutes. The process was truly like playing with Legos on your PC.

"The editing process is like scooping clay from a big block—it allows our mappers to focus on creativity rather than technical editing issues," says Sweeney.



The Unreal editor is unbelievably easy to use. It's possible to design a basic, playable, truly 3D level in a matter of hours. Of course, you can spend forever tweaking it...



THE MULTIPLAYER

UNREAL WILL BE BUILT SIMILARLY TO QUAKE IN THAT YOU CAN SET UP DEDICATED SERVERS FOR MULTIPLAYER GAMES THAT PLAYERS CAN ENTER AND JOIN AT WILL. UNREAL WILL BE PLAYABLE OVER THE INTERNET, AND INTERNET PLAY IS BEING DESIGNED TO WORK IN CONCERT WITH THE EDITOR.

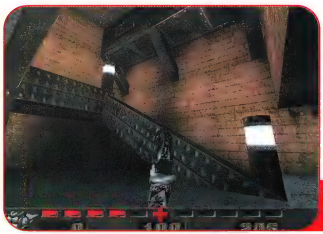
For example, Epic envisions giving you the ability to make your own levels and create your own Unreal world, which you can then put on a game server on the Internet. From here, you can start a deathmatch game, for example, and when you find and go through the level-end teleporter, you will be taken to another game server on the Internet, with a different user-created Unreal world...and so on.

The links between Unreal servers will be created much like simple Web links. Upon switching servers, you will likely be required to download a level map on the fly, which will result in some delay before entering a game; the files are somewhat large, between 500K and 1MB each.

Like all action games, latency is a prime concern for Internet play, but Unreal does have a major card up its sleeve: All player controls for movement are handled locally. This means you won't have any latency with your own movement in an Internet game, but you may see other players stop or projectiles lag if your connection's not good.

Epic says the number of players in a game will be limitless, but suggests a maximum of 16 players in one game. In addition to the Internet options, traditional modem and LAN multiplayer options will also be supported.

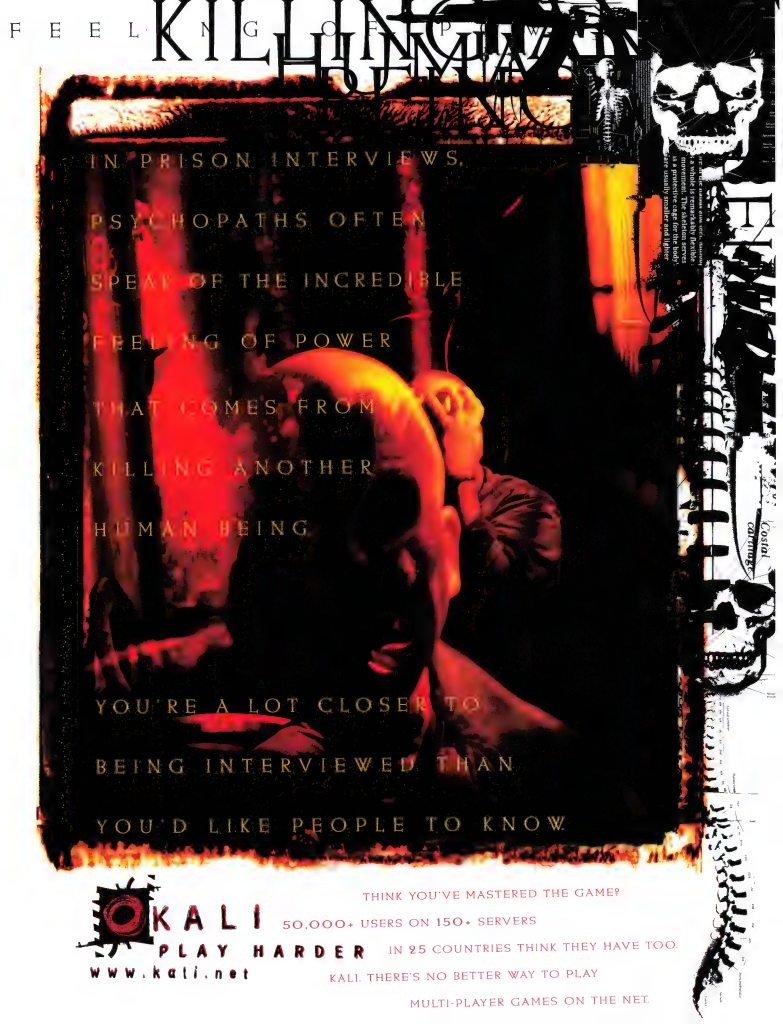
Epic is also looking at ways to make sure that when someone's killed in a deathmatch, they won't respawn in front of another player—a constant source of frustration in multiplayer games.



Unreal's environments are well-suited to players and enemies skulking in dark corners. Watch your back.

THE GAME

UNREAL IS ONE GAME THAT REALLY LOOKS TO HAVE IT ALL: the story, the technology, the AI, and the talent and passion to make it happen. It's too early to say if it's going to be a true Quake killer, but Unreal is one of the two or three games that the *PC Games* staff is most looking forward to playing this year. Rest assured, we'll keep you up to date on more information as we learn it; keep checking our Web site at **www.pcgames.com.**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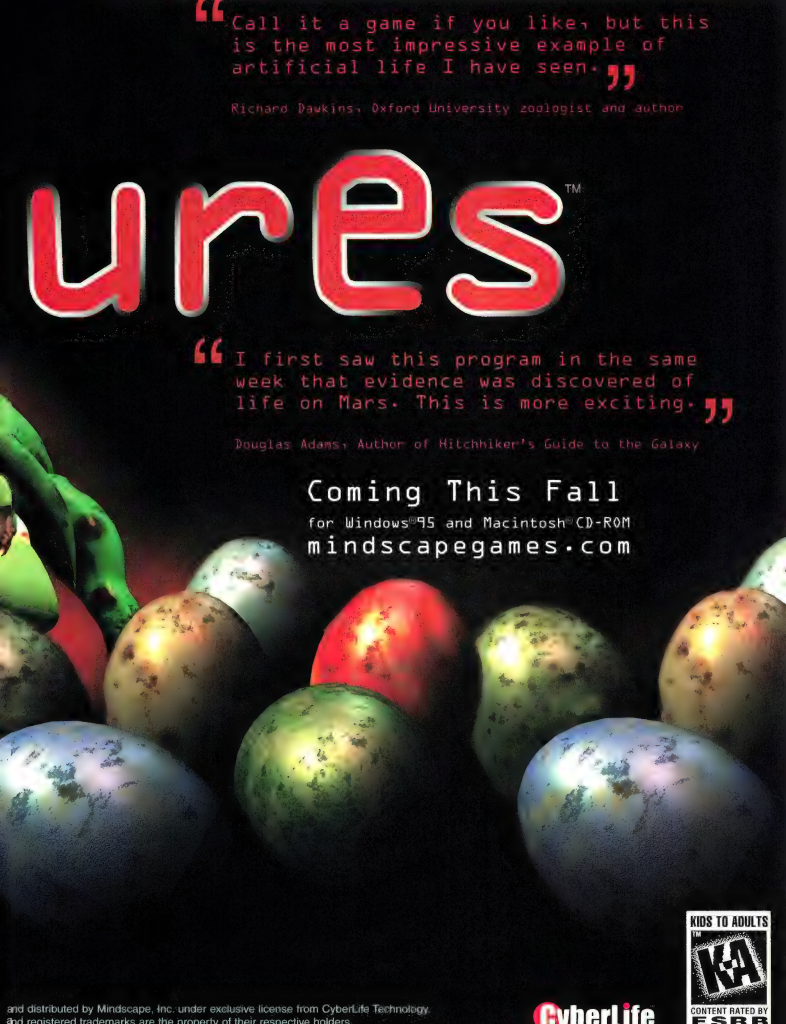
"Call it a game if you like, but this is the most impressive example of artificial life I have seen."
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PC GAMES A LIST™

BEST OF

For games we've rated as an A or A- over the past year, admittance to the A-List is the ultimate honor; if it's on this list, it's not just great, it *rocks*. Serious gamers will want all of these titles in their collections. Only the best are good enough for the A-List.

- **Afterlife** (LucasArts)
- **AH-64D Longbow** (Electronic Arts)
- **Civilization II** (MicroProse)
- **Close Combat** (Microsoft)
- **Command & Conquer: Red Alert** (Westwood Studios)
- **Crusader: No Regret** (Origin Systems)
- **Daggerfall** (Bethesda Softworks)
- **Diablo** (Blizzard Entertainment)
- **Duke Nukem 3D** (GT Interactive)
- **Links LS** (Access Software)
- **Lords of the Realm II** (Sierra On-Line)
- **Master of Orion II** (MicroProse)
- **MechWarrior 2: Mercenaries** (Activision)
- **The Neverhood** (DreamWorks)
- **The Pandora Directive** (Access Software)
- **Quake** (GT Interactive)
- **Silent Hunter** (Strategic Simulations Inc.)
- **Syndicate Wars** (Electronic Arts)
- **Wing Commander IV** (Origin Systems)
- **Zork: Nemesis** (Activision)

WHAT WE'RE PLAYING

Yes, the *PC Games* editors play tons of games, but there are some that we've stuck with beyond the call of duty. Here are the five games we've been playing the most over the past month.

1. Diablo
2. MDK
3. Quake
4. C&C: Red Alert
5. Duke Nukem 3D

HOW WE RATE GAMES

Here at *PC Games* we use a letter-grade system to rate games. Everyone who's gone to school knows what our grades mean without needing an in-depth explanation or clever chart: an A+ is the best score possible and an F is a complete bust. To give you a better feel for the overall quality of a title, we rate each game in six key areas. We also select a Game of the Month for each issue.

GAME of the MONTH: The *PC Games* Game of the Month is the one title among the month's releases that stands out from the rest. It's generally the best overall game of the month, although occasionally a game will warrant this honor despite its not being rated as highly as some other games because it's a standout in one or more areas.

GAMEPLAY: In a nutshell, how much fun is it to play? This takes into account the quality of the game's interface and control scheme.

GETTING STARTED: How much reading, studying, and hardware-tweaking are required before you can start to have fun? (The less the better.)

GRAPHICS: How advanced and attractive are the game's visual elements, and how well do they serve the game?

SOUND CHECK: How good are the game's sound effects and musical score, and how well do they serve the game?

OVERALL GRADE: Taking everything into account, how strongly do we recommend the game for purchase?

MULTIPLAYER: How much value will you get from the game's multiplayer element, if there is one? This takes into account ease of multiplayer setup. An independent rating.

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BOT-JACKING, WHAT THE *@#! IS THE WORLD COMING TO?

"...state of the art." -PC MAGAZINE

"...kick-ass first person mech gameplay." -PC GAMES

"...literally stomping out the competition." -CNET.COM

"...action-packed..." -PC GAMER ONLINE

"...intriguing new gameplay concepts." -CNET.COM

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PLAYER

TEEN T

Redline

By Rob Smith

The birth of a game

Fast, futuristic vehicles will offer plenty of cool features to damage opponents.

The game you're currently playing—it's good, is it? It's a fair bet that you probably think so after having shelled out all that cash. But as you blast aliens, uncover secrets, visit strange lands, and boldly go, did you ever stop to wonder what was involved in bringing that game to your computer? When did it begin? Where did it come from? Who conceived the idea? Who shaped that idea and turned it into a visible creation? What did they go through? Why did they decide to make it work this way rather than that?

It's a fascinating story when you delve below the surface. *PC Games* got an exclusive first-look at Redline, a game being developed by Beyond Games to be published by Accolade in time for Christmas. Despite being nine months from hitting the shelves when we saw it, the whole concept was exciting and innovative. We asked those questions about where it came from and how it's reached its current state—the answers, the story behind the story, begins here. Over the coming months, you'll get to know the trials and tribulations, the pain and suffering, the joy and laughter involved in bringing a game to the PC.

Welcome to the birth of Redline…

Wham! Redline's concept art packs as much punch as the game.

The Protagonists

Kris Johnson: president and lead programmer
Clark Stacey: vice president and producer
Jim Meier: lead artist, rendering
Dale Meier: lead artist, modeling
Bruce Johnson: lead PSX programmer and networking guru

Beyond Games is a group of dedicated gamers based in Salt Lake City, Utah, who've already managed to get a couple of games under their belt: BattleWheels for the Atari Lynx and Ultra Vortek for the Jaguar. Though these early games were for console systems, the ever-expanding world of PC gaming eventually came up with the hardware to support the company's concepts for a fantastic game.

Redline: The Introduction

Welcome to Redline, a game of vehicle combat set in the near future. Essentially, it's a first-person shooter in which you take the driving seat of an armored, weapon-packed vehicle in a form of arena combat. But this simplifies the essence of Redline too much. From a technology standpoint, Beyond Games is going out on a limb to produce a 3D-accelerated–only game. The power needed to drive the ideas and concept is becoming reality as PCs grow faster and cheaper, but more importantly, the game itself can do the graphics juggling tricks needed to create a thoroughly immersive game environment. This also has to work for multiplayer gaming, as there's no point in battling against computer-controlled vehicles when there are legions of gamers wanting to try out all manner of action games over the Internet.

This is where Redline is headed as it passes its milestones on the way to release. But where did the game come from?

Redline's powerful game engine will allow you to see distant objects clearly.

In the Beginning

The year is 1990, two years before the official formation of Beyond Games, and a bunch of video-game enthusiasts are brainstorming ideas on what would make the ultimate vehicular-combat game. What did they come up with? Necessary components: high detail, massive sight distance, flawless vehicle physics, and totally twisted, unique weapons. On top of that, the game needed a fully mature world in which to set all this action. But the arcade was where the game was originally headed, since the power of the PC and the market were not there.

With time to develop, the story unfolded gradually with contributions from all fronts. Clark Stacey finalized the background stories and created the gang system and character-progression model that shifts Redline into the realms of action/RPG.

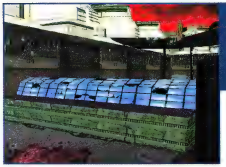
Visualizing a world is what gives the storyline and background a physical substance. Jim Meier and Dale Meier contributed their visions to bring a tangible existence to Stacey's evolving world.

What was needed to start bringing the game concept together was an engine: technological advancement of this genre was high on the priority

list, matched only by the desire to ensure a cohesive, involving storyline that would give substance to Redline's action-based events. First-person shooters were appearing regularly by now, and each tried to push the technology envelope. Yet, the Beyond team still saw the gap where a story would take the player from simply being a trigger finger in a random environment to a character in an evolving story.

But from where did the elements that make the engine so special emerge? It came to president and lead programmer Kris Johnson in a dream.

The engine was christened Daedalus, after the Greek mythology character who created wings to fly himself and his son from the Minotaur's labyrinth. A scripting system—to tweak and fine-tune all the elements of gameplay, from explosions to enemy AI, and then test them without resorting to recompiling code—freed the designers from



You'll need strategy and some careful exploration to beat these levels.

the shackles of throwing players into an enclosed, limiting maze. It also dismissed the fighting between the programmers and designers to ensure their carefully designed gameplay concepts could be incorporated.

A detailed tiling method accompanying the scripting language allowed the creation of realistic outdoor environments, packed with detail as far as the eye can see. Once these elements were in place, the sim aspect of modeling the physics of vehicles emerged.

The Business of Games Publishing

In the words of Beyond's biz guy, Stacey, "Schlepping a game concept around to different publishers—no matter how good it is—is a process better imagined than witnessed. It was important to us not just to fund our development and get the game on the shelves, but to find a publisher that would share our vision of the game. Accolade came along at the perfect time, and our companies are a good fit. They, too, have a close-knit team that works and plays well together. I think it was our excitement about the game that sold us to them, and their excitement certainly sold them to us.

"The most important thing I learned in the process of finding a publisher," he adds, "is how important it is to get out and meet people in the industry, including hardware manufacturers, people who make joysticks, accelerators, network cards, etc., as software helps drive hardware sales."

The Current State of Play

With the core engine complete, the AI beginning to mature, and the scripting foundations set, gameplay ideas are emerging on a regular basis. Now comes the problems: deadlines have been set for when the game has to ship, and suddenly the floating ideas and concepts either have to become concrete additions or added to the wish list for a future version. So will the radar be mounted on the dash, on the HUD, or both? Can you drown in your car? Where do you draw the line between real-world physics and fun?

Interface issues will probably be discussed till the last day of production. When will the final call be made?

Stacey looks at the design issues this way: "A doctor told me once that when a surgeon walks into the operating room, he or she needs to believe with absolute conviction that they are the greatest surgeon alive, and that no one but them could possibly perform the operation they need to do. We approach game development the same way—each of us believes that we are the absolute best at what we do, and that there is simply no other development team around that could bring this game to life. I imagine other developers on the edge look at their work the same way."

At press time, there are still seven months of development time for many of these issues to change, evolve, be discarded or replaced. The story has just begun...

In first-person view, the speedy action becomes frantic.

REDLINE

Developer:	Beyond Games
Publisher:	Accolade 800-245-7744 www.accolade.com
Platform:	Win 95 CD
Available:	October 1997

Stay tuned for monthly coverage on the development of Redline, both in subsequent issues and on *PC Games*' Web site at www.pcgames.com.

Jump into the driving seat of a new kind of real-time strategy game

Uprising

By Rob Smith

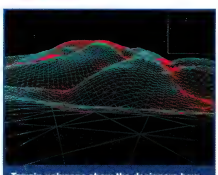
In Wraith tank mode, the HUD features all the information you need to continue managing the resource elements.

Could it be that the real-time strategy genre is set to embrace a game with a truly different perspective on the action/combat/strategy mix? After an early look at Uprising, it seems possible.

Cyclone Studios, known mainly for producing Battlesport and Captain Quazar (both of which enjoyed success on the 3DO), has taken an old theme and transformed it into a potential winner. Here's the deal: It's that familiar grim, military-dominated future, and violent clan uprisings have gotten a little out of control. Someone's trying to save what's left of humanity, and leaving a trail of bodies and smoldering shrapnel in their wake. You jump into the command seat of one of these clans with a campaign plan that will span 25 missions (chosen from the 35 that will ship in the initial release, based on the kind of jobs you prefer).

Yes, there are resources to manage. Yes, there are units to build. But the key factor in Uprising is the first-person action slant that places you in the driving seat of either a state-of-the-art Wraith tank or the gun turret of your home Citadel. Controlling Citadels is the key to developing your forces, as one factory can be built per Citadel; the more you occupy, the more tanks and other mechanized units can be built and deployed.

The action is certainly intense and explosive from the first-person view.



Terrain polygons show the designers how to apply the textures to give the maps a smooth, rolling look.

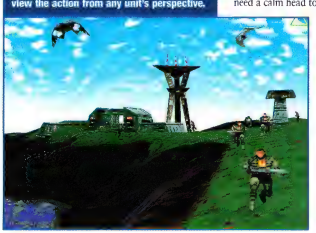
But it's really the explosive, manic action that's going to be a huge draw, using Cyclone's TerraTech 3D engine. Jumping into the Wraith tank lets you explore the surrounding area of the various maps (hills, grass, snow, lava, lunar, and even night maps cover most themes). The Wraith is a powerful beast, capable of dishing out some serious punishment on suitable targets. The handling will be straightforward, but with engine, weapon, and shield ratios to be set, there's plenty of involvement from a driving perspective. All the while, you'll need a calm head to manipulate your resources successfully.

Should your Citadel come under attack and any defensive units be either ineffective or not in place, you can jump in the turret to start blasting away at whatever strays into your line of fire. The action is fast and furious with whatever element you're controlling, and watching winged enemy jers lose control and spiral into a ball of flame is incredibly cool. Impressive explosions (even in the standard low-res format, which enables smooth frame rates) affect not only your visual senses, but the map terrain as well.

A persistent technology tree runs through the campaign game, meaning that research developments made during one mission will follow through to subsequent tasks, enhancing the flow of the storyline through the mission structure.

Four-player network support is slated, as are hi-res graphics that'll take advantage of the latest 3D graphics cards, which should be an established part of the market by the game's scheduled October launch. To suggest that Uprising may be a breath of fresh air in an increasingly stale real-time strategy market may be overstepping the bounds a little, but with the features in place when we saw and played it, it has the potential to be a lot of fun.

While you can only physically control the Wraith and the Citadel gun, you'll be able to view the action from any unit's perspective.



UPRISING

DEVELOPER:	Cyclone Studios
PUBLISHER:	Studio 3DO 800-336-3506 www.3do.com/studio3do
PLATFORM:	Win 95
AVAILABLE:	October 1997

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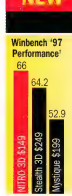

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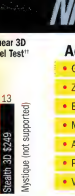

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Meat Puppets

By Rob Smith

Every once in a while, a sneak peek at a game in development will leave us stunned by its visual appeal, or its innovative gameplay, or its cutting-edge technology. Rarely, however, does a game's story have such an effect. In Meat Puppets, producer David Sears of Kronos Digital Entertainment has devised and incorporated a tale that would outdo many Hollywood studios for sheer inventiveness.

A cutting satire on modern health care and technology development would not, under normal circumstances, warrant much attention. But add

What the bloody hell is this all about?

a dark, futuristic setting and a lead character who would certainly kick Lara Croft's butt in a catfight (a fight we'd love to see—just don't tell Don King that), and the scene is set for something quite remarkable.

Lotos Abstraction—yes, that really is her name—is the star of the show. She has become the unwitting puppet, a Meat Puppet, in a deadly game of corporate conflict. Controlled by an unseen character known as the Martinet, Lotos' complete attention to her assignments is ensured by a cache of chemicals embedded under her skin. Judging by her form-fitting body armor (and what a form!), Lotos just might replace Lara as the new bad boys' adventure-game pin-up.

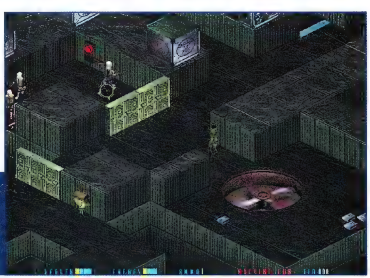
This deadly heroine may not be the kind of girl you'd want to take home to mother, but her harsh attitude is understandable. Relieved of her memory, she has been given the nigh-impossible task of assassinating the leaders of the six main "Embassies." In this corporate future, technological development has slithered in all directions, many involving genetic manipulation. This setting serves as a background for some truly gruesome enemies in the shape of maniac toddlers and their hatchet-faced nurses.

A digital entity known as Dumaine keeps the Martinet informed of Lotos' progress. Accessed through an electronic display, Dumaine offers vital information through the course of the game, helping Lotos solve puzzles and keeping her up-to-date on Martinet's wishes.

Meat Puppets is played via the same 3D isometric view as games like Crusader: No Regret. Colorful, highly detailed, and frequently disturbing graphics give the game a very distinctive style, and the monsters each have their own unique animation sets. While a real buff Pentium may be needed for the highest level of detail, the action's going to look good no matter what setup you have.

A full 360-degree range of fire will let Lotos unleash a deadly arsenal of ammo from her ever-present gun. But it's not all blazing guns; puzzles will also play a significant role in the game. The levels will feature large playing areas that include buildings you'll explore floor by floor.

However Meat Puppets turns out, there will be no denying its distinctive look and character.



Doors, keys, and puzzle-solving will hamper Lotos' progress. Her gun will help blaze a path.

The Embassies and Their Bosses

House of Plasm: specialize in programmable DNA.

Lions of Industry, CEO Emile Medamothi: develop machines for the space race, but have plans to destroy (and get the contracts to rebuild) various cities.

Institute for Trained Metals and Polymers, Ambassador Jonathan Guilt: programmable plastic has all kinds of potential uses!

Eugenics Clinic, ambassadors Cicero and Coronado Cousin: perform genetic tampering/melding on humans and animals to create soldiers and workers.

Distopia, five nameless chieftains: supply weapons to the people to gain domination through anarchy.

Introspect, Ambassador Apex: machines with sentience are their specialty. Seek domination through owning the rights to the source code of oracles.

MEAT PUPPETS

Developer: Kronos Digital Entertainment
Publisher: Playmates Interactive Entertainment
714-428-2112
www.playmatestoys.com
Platform: Win 95 CD
Available: July 1997

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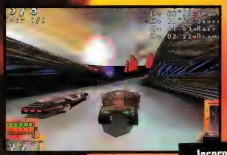

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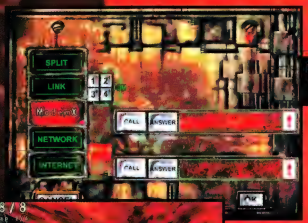

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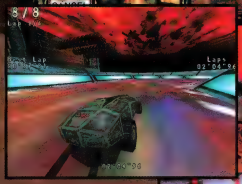

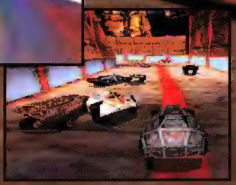

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SNEAK PEEK

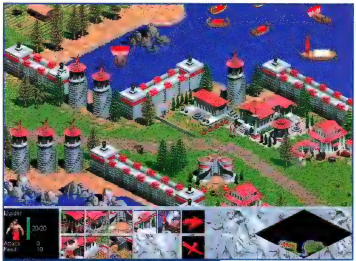
Finally, another good ancient-civilization sim

Age of Empires

By George T. Chronis

Simulations based in ancient history tend to be a mixed bag of good intentions and compromises. Although Civilization II marks the high point in the genre, the half-price bins at Egghead are littered with the remains of games that either got their history wrong, possessed a flawed resource-management model, or just weren't fun to play. After a lengthy beta-test-drive of Ensemble's Age of Empires, it's refreshing to see that someone has stoked some fire back into the ancient-civilization genre.

The best news is that Age of Empires plays like a high-resolution combination of Civilization, Red Alert, and Warcraft. Players start off with their own prehistoric tribe, from which they can build a village that can be expanded into a sizable empire. Your choices include not only the expected Greek, Roman, and Egyptian cultures, but a multitude of Middle Eastern and Asian cultures as well. Once a tribe starts to advance, its buildings, ships, clothing, and weapons take on the distinct appearance of the selected culture.



Bodies of water, exploitable for trade and war, will be a crucial component of the game.

The true beauty of the game is the ease with which you will manage the cultures from Empires' interface. Villagers can be selected, singularly or in concert, to actually build housing, markets, granaries, barracks, and boat docks in real time while you watch; as in Civilization, building economic-based structures is rewarded with a new technological path. Villagers can also be ordered to tend farms, quarry stone, harvest forests, or pick fruit trees. If hungry lions get too close to camp, you can send a few villagers to hunt them; once the beasts are slain, you get to watch the hardy fellows carry hunks of meat back to camp. If someone attacks your barracks, send a few villagers to conduct repairs while your clubmen beat the interlopers into a bloody pulp.

Ah, yes, the military. As you devote resources to technological advancement, your troops can be upgraded to axemen, swordsmen, and on up the line. Later in the game, you can develop religion and train priests. While frail when confronted by a warrior in battle, priests in numbers can convert warriors and key enemy structures to your cause. On the water, you can construct ships for fishing, war or trade. As with the warriors, your ships will be upgraded as your culture develops.

Growth is based on the resources you have available. Wood, food, and stone are important early on; gold takes on more importance later. One nice feature is the ability to build up food stores from fruit trees, fishing or game kills. (Sorry, dead human enemies don't count.) This lets you keep extra resources in reserve and a few villages in hiding. If an opponent decimates your camp, you can send the extra villagers to a new remote location to rebuild using the reserves.

Age of Empires will support LAN, modem-to-modem, and Internet multiplay; whether Microsoft will keep the game exclusive to its new Internet Gaming Zone Web site for online play has not been determined. Regardless, the beta we tested was extremely stable and fun to play in single and multiplayer modes. No question about it—Age Of Empires looks promising.

Although war is inevitable, it won't be the only goal in Empires.

AGE OF EMPIRES

Developer:	Ensemble Studios
Publisher:	Microsoft 800-426-9400 www.microsoft.com
Platform:	Win 95 CD
Available:	Fall 1997

Warlords 3

By Barry Brenesal

SSG's first two Warlords games set a standard for turn-based strategy games set in an alternate fantasy universe. They offered eight opponents with dozens of distinctive armies and monsters, cunning, configurable AI, diplomacy, and attractive environments. Warlords 2 added the diplomatic options and heroes. Now Warlords 3 looks to be another leap forward.

Attractive pictures heighten the reality as you choose new units to build in your castles.

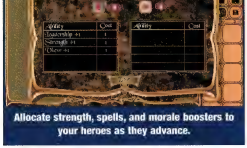
Judging from the beta we saw, improvements to diplomacy are among the most exciting changes to Warlords 3. Each computer opponent keeps an index of its relations not just with other players, but of all the interactions between other players. This promotes the formation of broadly defined factions, so that you're more likely to annoy a player whose ally you have attacked and befriend a player whose enemies' castles you have liberated.

Hand in hand with this, wars with computer-controlled players are no longer necessarily to the death: Warlords 3 allows you to accept or offer peace. As a result, games are longer, with a shifting balance of power involving your computer opponents, who seem uncannily human.

Perhaps that's also because the computer AI, always good in the earlier two versions, has improved as well. It does a better job of handling movement recalculations due to changing conditions (enemy units en route, castles that have switched allegiance, etc.). It also uses more intelligent subroutines, such as asking whether a particular path would be quicker if units with a terrain bonus were included in a given stack.

In case you don't want to play against the computer, Warlords 3 allows up to eight human players to join in the fun. Current plans also provide for a feature quietly excluding your choice of opponents from in-game conversation, thus permitting Machiavellian plans and treachery.

In another cool feature, the heroes are more powerful in Warlords 3. They can gain more levels—up to 10—and you control the allocation of training points toward different ability classes, customized for each hero class. There are now more than 50 spells in the game, all customized according to class.



Allocate strength, spells, and morale boosters to your heroes as they advance.

Hero quests are no longer found in temples; instead, you acquire them in cities. You choose among three flavors of difficulty, with appropriately scaled rewards. This corrects the mismatching of quests and rewards in Warlords 2, where you might be required to raze a castle halfway across the world that was owned by your most powerful opponent, all for the equivalent of a magical whoopee cushion.

New graphics simulating 3D effects are one of the game's highlights.

Admittedly, we were a little less excited about the new game interface. The sheer number of commands in Warlords 3 means long lists of choices, sometimes more than a dozen, appearing under a relatively small number of icons. They're displayed using a minuscule font, which makes finding what you need almost a game in itself. In Warlords 2 you could hit two key combinations in sequence and activate nearly every game command via a menubar; that option has been removed. Another Warlords 2 feature that's missing-and-regretted is the four shortcut buttons to which you could attach your selection of often-used commands.

The graphic improvements are largely for the better: The 2D visuals of Warlords 2 have been replaced by a topdown, 3D view that features excellent animation. (The objects appear to be Claymation, but everything else is hand-animated.) Dialog boxes add a considerable pseudo-medieval flavor to the game, particularly in the quality artwork used to illustrate individual units.

Among turn-based fantasy-strategy games, Warlords 3 looks to most impress the hardcore strategist. Its AI and diplomatic game substructure not only blow away the immediate, fantasy-based competition, but other strategic wargames as well. Desktop generals definitely should watch for this one.

WARLORDS 3

Developer:	SSG
Publisher:	Broderbund 800-521-6263 www.broderbund.com
Platform:	Win 95 CD
Available	Summer 1997

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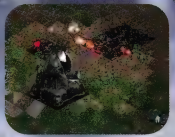
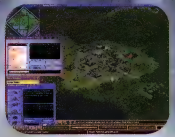
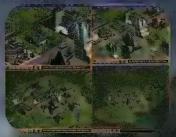

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SNEAK PEEK

PRO PINBALL: TIMESHOCK

Empire's Pro Pinball: The Web—one of the finest pinball sims available—is getting even better. The company's forthcoming Timeshock takes The Web's engine and enhances it with a number of tweaks. The controls will be more responsive and realistic, and it's now backed by a time-traveling story that illuminates tests of skill over Mount Rushmore, in Ancient Rome, with dinosaurs, and in the far future. Running in resolutions up to 1600-by-1200 True Color, Timeshock looks quite amazing, and there are a few secrets and surprises on the gameplay front that will require hours of practice to unearth. Due out: summer.

WAR INC.

Had enough of real-time strategy? I-Magic doesn't think so. Its upcoming War Inc. will offer two styles of play—a resource-conscious, strategic approach of scientific research and development, and the action-based culmination of building these units. As the boss of a mercenary corporation, you'll choose either or both kinds of play as you determine the outcome of a world-peace initiative. Due out: late May.

DARK COLONY

GameTek is bringing development in-house for its contribution to the real-time strategy genre. With the focus firmly on action, this sci-fi based game will feature a conflict between humans and the ubiquitous Grays through approximately 50 missions. New features in unit-building should make getting to the graphically detailed explosive action pretty quick—and, of course, there will be network- and Internet-play options. A publisher for the project has yet to be named. Due out: fall.

Extreme Assault

Helicopter dogfights end in colorful explosions.

Arcade action of the simple, trigger-happy, pulse-racing variety is the hallmark of this fine-looking 3D shooter from Blue Byte. Approximately 50 quick-hit missions will test your driving and flying skills as you pilot a state-of-the-art Sioux AH-23 attack helicopter and drive a T1 battle tank in a fast-paced purge of alien scum.

Aliens have decided to take up residence in a bunch of hidden locations, and your job is a simple seek-and-destroy

A twitch-gamer's dream

against 20 enemy types over six different terrains. It's all about action, with a range of weapon systems in each vehicle offering a variety of ammo types with which to deal death. Unlimited cannon ammo, laser cannons, and missiles are supplied from the get-go, but there are a number of other weapons to be collected in the form of powerups.

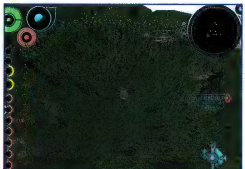
Supported by some excellent graphics in the explosion department and detailed terrain to explore, Extreme Assault is one of those games set to show console gamers that they're not the only ones able to enjoy a good shoot-'em-up. On top of that, multiplayer games with up to four players over a LAN (Internet support is possible as well) on some specifically designed deathmatch levels will add an extra dimension. —*Rob Smith*

EXTREME ASSAULT

- **Publisher:** Blue Byte
  847-998-9981
  www.bluebyte.com
- **Platform:** DOS/Win 95 CD
- **Available:** June 1997

Flying Saucer

Fly a "realistic" UFO



The ruins of Tikal, Guatemala, hide ASA agents trying to stop you from learning the truth.

You can't get away from it, try as you might. Conspiracy theories are rife, and the games industry in particular is overflowing with suggestions and ideas about what's going on in our dealings with extraterrestrial life. AnyRiver Entertainment's Flying Saucer, using the animation talents of WildBrain (creator of MTV's *Aeon Flux*), wants to throw you into the middle of cover-ups and shadowy government agencies.

In an intro sequence highlighting the quality of the animation, you see your girlfriend, Emily, being whisked away by aliens. Naturally, playing the concerned boyfriend, Boone, you set off on a rescue mission that will cover the infamous Area 51, UFOs, and the mysterious alien race known as the "Greys."

Alien abduction reports have been used as a basis for fleshing out a detailed storyline that incorporates a second alien race and the Advanced Security Agency (ASA). The gameplay includes piloting a UFO in a series of combat missions. Flying this ship promises to be a bizarre experience, as it skids and slides using a physics model that can't exactly be called realistic—after all, who knows how UFOs fly (besides the government, that is)?

Still, this first-person action/adventure taps into the ever-popular vogue for alien/government conspiracy theories. Interspersing the discovery and adventure elements, fast-paced action segments offer some well-rounded gameplay. It'll be out there, somewhere, this summer. —*Rob Smith*

FLYING SAUCER

- **Publisher:** AnyRiver Entertainment
  415-742-7932
  www.anyriver.com
- **Platform:** Win 95 CD
- **Available:** Summer 1997

Microsoft Baseball 3D

You want to play computer baseball? Microsoft is ready to oblige with Microsoft Baseball 3D, a projected fall release that aims to up the ante in baseball gaming with a serious 3D experience.

An early look at Baseball 3D showed off a release that looks far more immersive than such

A pennant contender

prior standouts as Hardball and Tony La Russa Baseball. A one-inning demo put us right in the thick of the action with a closer behind-the-plate view than Hardball, facing motion-captured pitching and ball physics that mirrored the real thing. Limitless camera angles showed off the 16-bit graphical action beautifully, and players—even at this early stage—behaved with excellent AI, moving to cover the correct base time after time. If Microsoft and developer WizBang! follow through on Baseball 3D's early promise, it should be a formidable contender for the hearts and wallets of diamond addicts.

This view of the Ballyard in Texas shows off Baseball 3D's crisp, 16-bit graphics.

Producer Andrew Johnston of WizBang! says the company motion-captured AAA-level ballplayers to ensure realistic movement, and is modeling the AI with ADLIB, a company-developed authoring language that assigns and randomizes multiple behaviors for any given action during gameplay. "ADLIB is the key to making this work," Johnston says. "Every player has a list of actions that changes depending on the primary events of the play, and the game engine deals with those immediately."

Microsoft has both Major League Baseball and MLB Players Association licenses for Baseball 3D, meaning that it'll have all current teams, stadiums, and players. Stats updates will be available online, and Johnston says every player's behavior will be modeled on his stats to achieve gameplay as close to players' real tendencies as possible.

As with other recent Microsoft announcements, Baseball 3D will be multiplayerable over a LAN and for free through the Internet Gaming Zone, Microsoft's online gaming area; expect Zone leagues and seasons to result. Play ball, indeed.

—Don St. John

MICROSOFT BASEBALL 3D

DEVELOPER:	WizBang! Software Productions
PUBLISHER:	Microsoft 800-426-9400 www.microsoft.com/games/
PLATFORM:	Win 95 CD
AVAILABLE:	Fall 1997

The Condemned

As much of a kick as the MechWarrior series is to play, there isn't a sense of speed as you engage the enemy in battle. The Condemned, an upcoming game by Gray Matter, addresses the need for speed in futuristic armored vehicles.

The Mech genre joins the cavalry

The premise is that convicts in a penal colony earn credits from their administrative masters for providing entertainment in the form of deadly mechanized combat. If you recall the basic setup of *The Running Man*, you'll understand The Condemned. Although this is a lackluster plot device, it does make possible two sterling virtues—cut scenes of a wisecracking news anchor played by *SCTV*'s Eugene Levy, and some surprisingly fast gameplay.

Working from a limited selection of parts, which must be purchased before each match, you piece together a customized vehicle of your choice. For instance, you can construct a wheeled, tracked, biped-legged, insect-legged or hovercraft-based vehicle. The number of weapons is also diverse—everything from Gatling guns and plasma cannons to small nukes. Once your vehicle is outfitted, you're off to a free-for-all battle to be the last combatant standing.

Because points and credits are scored based on the entertainment value of the matches, not victory alone, blasting away a comrade at the last moment in cooperative matches earns large bonuses. Unfortunately, the game's AI in the alpha we tested was still too limited to gauge how much fun solo play will be.

For now, Gray Matter is building multiplayer support for up to 16 players on LANs or the Internet—the latter via Microsoft's Internet Gaming Zone. The diversity of vehicle platforms, combined with the speed in multiplay, should make The Condemned popular.

—George T. Chronis

The Condemned uses a unique take on Voxel graphics to deliver high-resolution images.

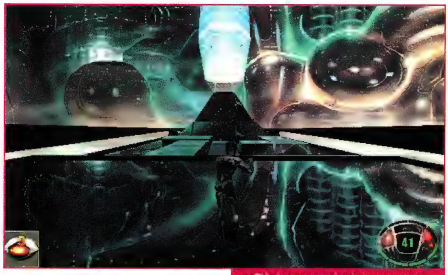
THE CONDEMNED

DEVELOPER:	Gray Matter
PUBLISHER:	Microsoft 800-426-9400 www.microsoft.com/games/
PLATFORM:	Win 95 CD
AVAILABLE:	Winter 1997

GAME OF THE MONTH

MDK

By Rob Smith



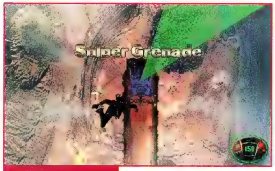
This is an unaccelerated screenshot. Honest, it really does look this amazing.

Back in the December issue of *PC Games*, we suggested upfront that MDK could set a new standard in PC gaming. Quite simply, it does, in ways that are many and varied and a joy to behold.

Single-player games live on

Three characters form the focus of the plotline: Kurt Hectic (you), Dr. Fluke Hawkins, and their dog, Max. Between them they have planet Earth to save. It's the year 1999, and some bizarre occurrences have piqued the interest of the good Doctor. In the name of scientific research, he, Kurt, and Max blast off to study these anomalies. Their timing is impeccable: While on the mission, a group of aliens known as the Stream Riders invades Earth. Mining is their prime objective, and to this end they employ huge Minecrawlers that stripmine the planet's surface, wiping out every semblance of human existence as they go.

Dr. Hawkins is something of a whiz on the inventions front, but Kurt is the young heroic type, and thus is the one to don a blastproof armor suit and wield the latest in really cool weaponry. A quick-access parachute gives Kurt extra distance on running jumps and also proves vital in accessing certain areas where hot-air vents blast upward. But it's the helmet-mounted rapid-fire gun/sniper's rifle/ammo store that really gives Kurt the edge over the bad guys.



Avoid radar detection and nab the powerups as you descend to a city. On the first level, don't worry about taking damage as you fall: a health powerup awaits at the bottom.

Stealth and strategy play a critical role as you make your way through the six sprawling cities that need saving, with 60-plus different rooms to explore. Lookout droids hide around many corners; if Kurt blunders into a room, guns blazing, the alarm is sounded, and it seems like the wrath of the Furies is bearing down on him in an instant. The other approach—sniping—is a frighteningly fun method of safely diverting much of the potential conflict.

Before entering a room, you can scan around using the zoom mode to uncover the aliens' hiding places and defensive positions. One quick shot to the head—especially with powerup ammo such as homing bullets or mortar and sniper grenades—and there's one less enemy to contend with. But it's the detail that helps MDK stand out as such a superb, thoughtful game. To enhance the feeling of a living, breathing world overrun by beautifully detailed, polygon-based aliens, Shiny's made creatures that *react*. That doesn't just mean pounding in Kurt's general direction, all guns a-blazing. First, they have to locate you, so scanning the horizon is one reaction. A terrified dive for cover is another. You never know what these characters will do next.

Watching the world of MDK through the zoom feature is fascinating in itself. In the barren wastes of a Scottish city, spying on the guards pacing up and down reveals that even aliens don't like the cold. When one sneezes, you don't know whether to clear his sinuses with a bullet or run up to him with a handkerchief. Uncovering these subtle touches is a treat that makes every room compelling.

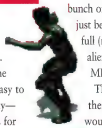
Of course, there are many times when sniping isn't the key; an arsenal of powerups such as Super Chain Gun Ammo, Hand Grenades, the World's Smallest Nuclear Explosion, and Tornadoes see to that. Ever wonder what the World's Most Interesting Bomb is? So do the aliens Kurt throws one at. They stop taking notice of him and gather round—it really is very interesting—right up until the point that it explodes, sending them to the great scrap-metal merchant in the sky.

The World's Smallest Nuclear Explosion is the key to opening many doors.

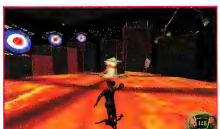
The action never stops, and Kurt's auto-targeting gun is welcome in keeping the incredibly fast pace going. Regardless of how

The frantic action requires expert control of Kurt, so make sure you're comfortable with strafing.

A bullet-follow cam shows exactly where you're hitting. This guy's laughing at you.



many individual shots are fired, or how many aliens come to join the party, the game never slows or loses quality. This means that the action looks more amazing than anything I've ever seen in a PC action game—period.



Shoot the spawn turrets before nailing these silly, target-wielding aliens in the head.

Much of the time, Kurt will be firing manically at a horde of ravaging aliens as they spawn from outlets or parachute in from a well-organized air force. You know when the bullets are hitting home, because they show green as they bounce off these tough critters. A health bar appears in the top-left corner of the screen to indicate how close to death's door they're getting. Tanks and static heavy-laser cannons take a huge number of hits (but capitulate rather quickly should Kurt call in Max, the pilot dog, to dump his load of bombs on the target).

Kurt gets transport, too. A couple of wide-open, alien-packed levels require a precise bombing run (the most amazing railed route ever) to clear some of the hardier aliens. And it's a joy to see the aliens in action: Some run haywire, while others stand formally in rank at the behest of their bigger alien cousin, just asking to have their parade broken up by a few hundred pounds of high explosives.

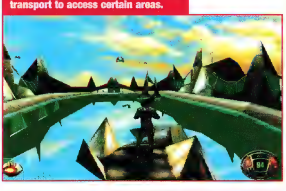
Then there's the snowboard. Traveling between each room involves winding through tunnels, but it's souped up by challenging courses, similarly snowboarding aliens, and static guards—all of which ensure that the journey is as fast and frenetic as possible.

If you've seen the screen shots from the build-up to MDK's release, it would be easy to think that they weren't from the gameplay—but just check out those here and witness for yourself how utterly phenomenal the game looks. The mirror-sided maze level is the finest-looking game environment I have ever seen. It may not be a perfect mirror (you can't see Kurt's reflection), but the effect is so stunning that this is easily overlooked. The quality isn't hit-and-miss: It's a constantly superlative standard that makes fighting through the cities to see what the next one looks like reason enough to keep going.

And that won't be easy, even on the simplest of the three difficulty levels. Save options are only available after completing a city, which can prove infuriating if one room stumps you but you have to fight through the previous two or three to take up the challenge again. In this respect, Shiny shows its console-game roots—and that's also evident in the platform elements that intersperse a number of levels.

Leaving a city involves a light ride through the Streams.

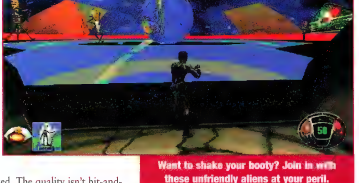
You'll need to hitch a ride on an alien transport to access certain areas.



Backed by a soundtrack featuring a whole bunch of pumping tunes and sound effects that just beg to have the speaker volume turned to full (making the cries and screams of the aliens all the more terrifying and satisfying), MDK is an experience not to be forgotten.

The current vogue is missing here—there's no multiplayer options, which would have been fun. However, you won't really miss them, as MDK is such a strong game in and of itself. Also, 3Dfx support is forthcoming, so you may be too blinded by the game's awesome looks to notice.

MDK is quite simply the most impressive single-player PC game ever. It'll take weeks to solve and months to unearth its many secrets. What awestruck months they'll be, too, as you soak up the nuances and subtleties of this veritable masterpiece.



Want to shake your booty? Join in with these unfriendly aliens at your peril.

MDK

GAMEPLAY:	A
GETTING STARTED:	A
GRAPHICS:	A+
SOUND CHECK:	A-

A OVERALL

MULTIPLAYER: N/A

The greatest single-player game ever.

DEVELOPER:	Shiny Entertainment
PUBLISHER:	Playmates Interactive Entertainment 714-428-2112 www.playmatestoys.com
PLATFORM:	DOS/Win 95 CD
REQUIRES:	Pentium, 16MB RAM, 1MB SVGA
RECOMMENDED:	P100, 4MB video card, sound card
STREET PRICE:	$50

PLAY THE DEMO ON PC GAMES.EXE CD-ROM

G-NOME

Mech madness with major multiplay

By Jason D'Aprile

Follow the leader as you infiltrate enemy territory. Better get that IFF code right!

7th Level has joined the surprisingly crowded genre of mechanized battle games, and it's made an auspicious start. G-NOME has enough fresh ideas and cool features to make it more than just an anonymous competitor in the market.

As Joshua Gant, a former special-forces sergeant, you'll storm through more than 20 challenging missions to discover the secret of the hideous G-NOMES—30-foot-tall genetically bred nightmares.

In the harsh environments of G-NOME, a foot soldier has it rough. Drop to the ground in troop standoffs and, by all means, take some cover until you reach a HAWC.

A multitude of vehicles, buildings, and gun turrets, almost all of which can be hijacked, add a totally new and extremely fun aspect to the otherwise familiar gameplay. By shooting a vehicle (most of which are robots, with a few hovercraft as well) with a Gas-Assault Shock Rifle, you can actually force the ejection of the pilot, steal the bot for yourself, then run the pilot over—a gleefully fun tactic, especially in multiplayer mode. Of course, the enemy can and will do the same to you.

IFF (Identify Friend or Foe) codes add another strategic element, as stealing an enemy's code makes you appear as one of them on radar. Just imagine the havoc you can wreak then.

In some missions, you'll enter buildings scattered throughout the landscape that contain IFF codes, repair and rearm stations, and bridge controls, among other things; these are usually vital to a mission's success. These distinctive features have been worked into the missions quite well, although the difficulty of the game (even on the easy setting) is rather striking right from the start.

The missions are structured so that trial and error becomes the only way to complete most of them. Comrades-in-arms help out as the game progresses, and you are able to send them commands much like in MechWarrior 2. The game's AI seems a little weak overall, however, and obstacles especially have a tendency to confuse the computer (very noticeable when trying to use the brain-dead auto-pilot feature).

Visually, G-NOME is good, but not great. It supports MMX, but only to help smooth out the gameplay. (A Direct3D version is planned, although 7th Level hasn't decided whether it will be a patch or a mission disc add-on.) There is noticeable texture warping, and the textures are rather blocky, but it runs well on target machines.

The use of location-specific damage is nowhere near the level of MechWarrior 2's (you can damage the legs on a HAWC, but you can't shoot them off), and at times the hit detection seems off as well. For the most part, the ground is always flat, but the game uses trees, rock clusters, rivers and mountains to give character to the landscape. Unfortunately, even small shrubs can grind your HAWC to a stop, which gets quite annoying.

G-NOME uses panning stereo sound, and the battle sound effects and music are both excellent. The lack of motion sounds (like Mech 2's footsteps) and other cockpit noises is a shame—you'll miss 'em.

Nevertheless, the multiplayer options are fantastic—LAN, TCP/IP Internet, modem, and Mplayer support are all included, with a maximum of eight players over a network. Multiplay is excellent, due to the sadistic ability to eject your friends, then mash them to a bloody pulp beneath their own HAWC's feet.

In all, cool multiplayer options and absorbing gameplay make G-NOME thoroughly entertaining. Mech heads wanting a real action blast will rejoice.

Hovercraft can skim over the rivers of lava.

G-NOME

GAMEPLAY:	B+
GETTING STARTED:	B
GRAPHICS :	B+
SOUND CHECK:	B+

B+ OVERALL

MULTIPLAYER: A

Nifty features make G-NOME a treat for fans of mechanized action.

PUBLISHER:	7th Level 800-556-0488 www.7thlevel.com
PLATFORM:	Win 95 CD
REQUIRES:	P90, 16MB RAM, 4X CD-ROM drive, DirectX 3.0 or higher
RECOMMENDED:	P120
STREET PRICE:	$50

TIPS

▼ Don't stay on foot any longer than you have to. There's usually a HAWC nearby wherever you go, although it might be currently occupied. ▼ When getting an IFF code from a building, change the code in your body suit first; then your HAWC's code will match it. ▼ HAWCs with torso twists are always the better choice. They let you run circles around your enemies while blowing them away a piece at a time. ▼ Always get rid of ground troops (i.e., ejected HAWC pilots) as soon as you see them. They can force you out of your own vehicle, leaving you in a very vulnerable position.

Archimedean Dynasty

By Daniel Morris

Waterworld *with submarines*

Each undersea station has its own cast of shady characters and opportunities for work.

Well, mankind held out for 600 years, but by the 27th century we went and nuked the planet into an irradiated wasteland. The survivors have gone underwater, living in isolated undersea bases.

Corporations feud with petty warlords, pirates, and anarchists for control of the world's sea lanes. In defense of commerce, Emerald "Deadeye" Flint has been hired by the reclusive El Topo to safeguard what he thought was a worthless shipment of sulfur. Of course, a raid by well-equipped mercenaries changed the plan, and only by a stroke of luck were you rescued and returned to El Topo's fortress.

That's where Archimedean Dynasty begins, after the first of many glorious cinematic story scenes. The game is structured much like Wing Commander IV or Privateer 2, in that it sends you to skulk through various stations and deal with dozens of characters. Character interaction is a little ropey in places where positive or negative responses don't make a difference. Thankfully, there are no Big Mysteries or Grand Puzzles to put together, and this is a refreshing load off the gamer's mind; you can just slide along from spot to spot advancing the storyline without panicking over notes you should be taking.

Fantastic art greets the eye at every location. Docks, weapons stores, lounges, offices—everything looks terrific. The tone and mood are dark and *Blade Runner*-esque, presenting a humanity carrying out its business in a vast undersea tomb that daylight never penetrates. The claustrophobia is wonderful, and provides the perfect atmosphere for the fighting that inevitably follows Flint wherever he wanders.

The meat and potatoes, of course, is the undersea combat. You are in control of a one-man submarine equipped with sonar, heat sensors, a HUD, and all manner of weaponry. As you progress and add cash to your account, you can upgrade to better equipment through visits with local arms dealers.

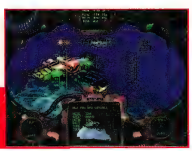
Run deep, but not silent—actually, it's okay to run loud.

The combat is thoroughly enjoyable. Visually, Archimedean Dynasty outdoes any of the other underwater-combat games. Battle is waged by squads of subs in conditions that can occasionally get very hot. Tangled dogfights spill through the valleys and mountains of the ocean floor. Your squadmates, when you have them, are always helping you out, but the reverse is true for the bad guy you're chasing—he's usually got a friend looking to deep-six you.

The action is rendered in eye-catching SVGA, and there are plenty of visual details to relish (my favorite being the corpses of pilots who are ejected from exploding craft, floating up to the surface). The combat is surprisingly sim-like for such a futuristic setting: every effort was made by the designers to make Archimedean Dynasty a convincing and "real" adventure as well as a fun shoot-'em-up. They succeeded on both fronts.

The otherwise stellar sound is marred by a cheesy narrator: The guy doing Flint's voiceover is trying so hard to be *Escape From New York*'s Snake Plissken that he weighs down the game whenever he's yapping, which is, thankfully, not often. Everything else in this department, though, is fantastic—operatic music, convincing futuresque sound effects inside the bases and docks, and engaging aural components to the battles.

Archimedean Dynasty wants to be Wing Commander IV, laying out an epic story in between missions, but it's more like Mech: Mercenaries. It's a low-key, semi-involved merc sim made recommendable by the variety and involvement of its missions. For well-constructed, thoughtful presentation, Archimedean Dynasty receives well-deserved kudos. It elevates this game above the genre of "action shooter" and makes it a rewarding experience.



Hope this guy packed his life jacket...

ARCHIMEDEAN DYNASTY

GAMEPLAY:	B
GETTING STARTED:	B
GRAPHICS:	B+
SOUND CHECK:	B

B
OVERALL

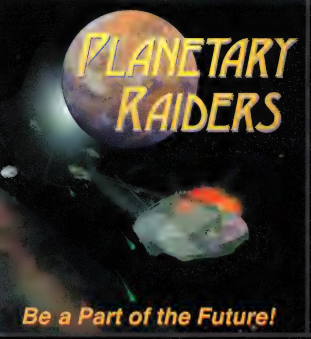
MULTIPLAYER: N/A

A rich underwater-combat sim with enough adventure elements to lift it above the limitations of the action genre.

DEVELOPER: Massive
PUBLISHER: Blue Byte
847-995-9981
www.bluebyte.com
PLATFORM: DOS/Win 95 CD
REQUIRES: 486/100, 8MB RAM, SVGA, 2X CD-ROM drive, sound card
RECOMMENDED: Pentium, joystick
STREET PRICE: $30

TIPS

▼ Cut your speed to a crawl for better maneuverability in dogfights (or whatever they call the undersea equivalent of a dogfight). ▼ Hug the ocean floor to use its rises as a means of stealthy approach and come up over the bluff to get the drop on the bad guy. ▼ Make friends with other independent mercs. They can drop you plum hints if you're on their good side. ▼ On that same note, don't be afraid to play both sides of a political rift. You're loyal to no one, and a nicely timed defection can work wonders for your career.



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- Computer & Net Player

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- Computer Gaming World

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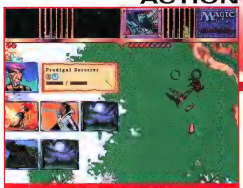
Magic: The Gathering—Battlemage



Here's the good news: you can get a fix patch from Acclaim's Web site.

Acclaim's take on the massively popular Wizards of the Coast card game is an action-oriented role-playing game that uses the spell-casting mechanics of its namesake. That's all many of you need to hear, but before you rush off to buy it, let me tell you: this one's not worth the money.

Taking the role of one of six planeswalkers, you can enter a standard one-on-one Magic duel, or take on the campaign mode. Fought in real time, the duels are fast-paced—once you work out the controls. Campaign play is turn-based, and you battle against other planeswalkers to dominate the 30 territories of the host nation, Corondor.

Oh, for a decent control method

A significant part of the Magic card game is the process of deck building (they use the term "Tome" here). An archive contains the details of all the cards (spells) in the game, and Battlemage includes all those spells up to and including Fourth Edition and Mirage expansion decks. Here, novices can find the required information for using all the cards in combat—their mana-casting cost and effect.

But it's in gameplay that Battlemage nosedives quite dramatically. The option screen is unintelligible due to the use of funky symbols to represent the action buttons. There's no indication of what these symbols may mean without recourse to the appallingly inadequate manual.

As you enter the game, things only get worse. Controlling your planeswalker, selecting the spells to cast from your deck and then targeting your opponent's creatures is hindered by a dreadful control method that is clumsy, obscures the play area, and does everything possible to hinder the basic play process.

It's a shame, because the action slant of Battlemage could've been quite appealing to Magic's many followers, particularly younger players. As it stands now, however, the game borders on the unplayable.

—*Rob Smith*

MTG—BATTLEMAGE

GAMEPLAY:	D
GETTING STARTED:	F
GRAPHICS:	C
SOUND CHECK:	B+
OVERALL	D
MULTIPLAYER:	C

What a waste: a wonderful license gets god-awful gameplay.

PUBLISHER:	Acclaim Entertainment 516-656-5000 www.acclaimnation.com
PLATFORM:	Win 95 CD
REQUIRES:	P90, 16MB RAM, 2MB PCI graphics card, 2X CD-ROM drive, sound card, mouse
RECOMMENDED:	P133, 28.8 modem
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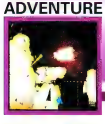
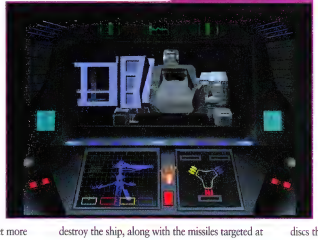


The Arrival

By Sam Marshall



Use the shuttle to travel between alien stations.

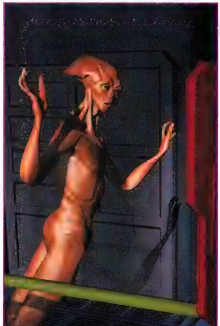
Though The Arrival bears the same name as the recent movie starring Charlie Sheen, the game picks up where the movie left off, so you won't know the ending before you start. In fact, there are a variety of endings, depending on your path through the 50-plus hours of gameplay.

In the flick, Sheen, a radio astronomer, discovered that bird-legged, vaguely humanoid aliens had been living on Earth and were secretly turning up the global thermostat to make the planet more habitable for themselves…and deadly for earthlings. Sheen managed to expose their plans on national TV, putting a stop to our mass extinction. But the aliens never left, and in the game, they're more intent than ever on stealing Earth.

Those aliens are back for more

As the game opens you stumble upon an alien contingent up to no good in the deserts of New Mexico. The aliens capture you and take you to their mother ship, which is orbiting a moon in a nearby solar system. Your mission: to escape your cell and destroy the ship, along with the missiles targeted at Earth. After that, you've got to find a way home.

The Arrival offers slick graphics with smooth 360-degree motion, and the video sequences and sound effects that introduce the game are very impressive. The aliens you meet, as well as the sometimes gory effects, are convincing enough to make you think, if only for a moment, that you're not just playing a computer game.



One of the beauties turns up the heat on Earth.

The developers made a conscious decision to forgo music during gameplay, opting instead for more realistic ambient noises such as generator hums and equipment clanks. For my part, I would have preferred at least a little well-composed background music to enhance dramatic moments, but it's not so bad.

What hurts the game more, however, is its tendency to lose momentum and logic at certain points. For starters, the first thing you have to do is figure out the right code to enter into a security pad on the inside of your cell. A prison cell with a code pad on the inside? With aliens this stupid, who needs to worry about an invasion? The floating-hand cursor used to point which way to go and to pick up items automatically makes a grasping motion when it's over the false panel, making searching around a lesson in sweeping the mouse across the screen.

The lack of strategic thinking necessary to win the game is what ultimately brings it down. There's no arcade-style shooting or flying action to break up the routine. Instead, you can only wander the ship (which has been conveniently evacuated by most of the aliens), explore its nuances, and pick up tools, clues, and codes. The clues are most often in the form of video discs that have inexplicably been left lying around.

The biggest challenge is solving the endless series of puzzles encountered when you try to open doors. The puzzles are the usual diet of pattern, tone, and number types, and range in difficulty from easy to moderate. I had to wonder, however, whether a civilization sophisticated enough for interstellar travel would really depend on such methods of security instead of DNA sequences or voice prints. But I guess speculating on future alien technology should be left to game designers.

An alien watches events from the ship's observation lounge.

THE ARRIVAL

GAMEPLAY:	C-
GETTING STARTED:	A
GRAPHICS :	A-
SOUND CHECK:	B
OVERALL	C+
MULTIPLAYER:	N/A

Good graphics and detailed settings are hampered by gameplay that borders on the illogical.

DEVELOPER:	Enteraktion Inc.
PUBLISHER:	Live Entertainment 818-778-3239 www.thearrival.com
PLATFORM:	Win 95 CD
REQUIRES:	P90, 8MB RAM. 4X CD-ROM drive, mouse, sound card
RECOMMENDED:	16MB RAM
STREET PRICE:	$49

TIPS

▼ If you get stuck at a puzzle, you can get tips by pressing Shift-?. Keep pressing it, and the game will offer to autosolve the puzzle.

▼ Save early, save often. Make the wrong move and you're dead without warning.

Ecstatica II

By Barry Brenesal

Fighters on either side, both angry. This may be one of those occasions where you wish you'd stuck with Scrabble.

If it moves, kill it

There's never any rest for a hero. Fresh from rescuing Princess Ecstatica from her demon-infested dreams, Joe, said hero, returns home to find his land overwhelmed by evil. The Holy Seal has been shattered! Joe must find its seven pieces and reunite them before dark forces create their own Unholy Seal. So begins Ecstatica II.

In some respects, it bears a striking resemblance to Dragon's Lair. From the opening sequence where Joe is struck from behind, carried aloft, and dropped into his own castle—now occupied by a horde of ravenous monsters charging him in every scene—it's clear that this game is a graphic adventure with an emphasis on non-stop action. There isn't a moment of rest, unless you hit Pause and go outside for some oxygen.

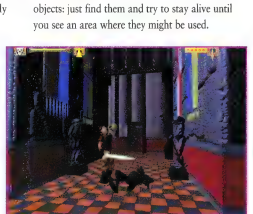
Some of Ecstatica II's best shots display the lighting and architectural sense of great cinema.

Take a closer look, however, and you'll realize that the similarities to Dragon's Lair are merely superficial. Ecstatica II uses an ellipsoid, object-oriented technology, where your keyboard commands supply extensive control over the environment. You can make Joe crouch, kick, jump, roll, stab, sweep, pick up, use, and drop items while various monsters attempt to punch, crunch, chomp, squeeze, shoot, dice, slice, and Cuisinart him. He doesn't just barrel down a painted-cel corridor with a single, optional movement to avoid an oncoming monster; no, he can jump to the left, kill to the right, do the hokey-po…well, you get the idea.

And there's no simplistic distinction between "right" and "wrong" paths in Ecstatica II. To be sure, you must discover the three missing skulls above the King's Crypt, for instance, and you must kill the Sorceress to acquire a magic ring that opens several important doors. But what you do at other times is wide-open. There are any number of "right" alternatives that yield interesting passageways, valuable loot, and fearsome livestock waiting for a quick hero sandwich. Ecstatica's random monster generator ensures those challenges are different each time you play.

Mastering the 17 keyboard controls isn't easy. I understand the selection of the direction keys for moving forward, turning left, etc., and having Alt-Up, etc., initiate a body roll makes good sense. Other choices, however, are not so intuitive. Ctrl-Left is Swipe, but Ctrl-Alt-Right is 360-Degree High Sweep. An option to reconfigure these controls would have been welcome, and perhaps a training room with a few monster types, too. Kicking when you mean to Crouch can have disastrous consequences for your head when there's a two-handed sword aimed directly at it.

Ecstatica II's puzzles aren't mind-stretching, but then, you wouldn't expect to answer Lewis Carroll conundrums while fending off three things with jaws bigger than your pet doberman. Don't worry about combining objects: just find them and try to stay alive until you see an area where they might be used.



Life-giving potions will help restore your health.

The graphics are smooth and the animations fluid—designer Andrew Spencer's ellipsoids do a far better job of expressing realistic humanoid and animal movement than traditional polygonal techniques. Drawing and coloration are both precise and atmospheric. All this comes at a cost measured in processing speed: don't attempt Ecstatica II on anything less than a P90.

In short, this game gets a thumb up. With a large playing environment, loads of perils, excellent game balance, sound AI, and great animation, it's one you'll want to play to the end.

ECSTATICA II

GAMEPLAY:	A-
GETTING STARTED:	C
GRAPHICS:	A-
SOUND CHECK:	B

B+ OVERALL

MULTIPLAYER: N/A

A fast-paced, beautifully animated, get-killed-anywhere/kill-everything graphic adventure.

DEVELOPER:	Andrew Spencer Studios
PUBLISHER:	Psygnosis 800-438-7794 www.psygnosis.com
PLATFORM:	Win 95 CD
REQUIRES:	P90, 16MB RAM, SVGA, 2X CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED:	P133, sound card
STREET PRICE:	$50

TIPS

▼ When you've completed a task, a crystal ball (located elsewhere in the game) will light up. Press the spacebar and you'll hear a hint. ▼ If something important appears as though it was deliberately placed in view, chances are it's booby-trapped—like the key suspended from the gargoyle's mouth at the top of the Guard Tower. ▼ Most switches and levers are untrapped, but some require other switches to be thrown before they will work. ▼ When in doubt, kick. It may not be very sociable, but it will certainly open many doors for you. ▼ Werewolves can only be killed with the silver sword.

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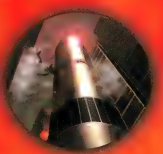

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The City of Lost Children

Against the well-shaded background, City's characters look flat.

As a surrealistic adventure, The City of Lost Children relies heavily upon the mood and character that made the movie so striking. But in the transition into a get-object-use-object graphic adventure, something is lost.

As both a game and a film, City is set in a vaguely 19th-century urban French port. It revolves around Miette, a 10-year-old orphaned girl, and Krank, a man made prematurely old because he cannot dream. To fill this gap, he's reduced to capturing children and stealing their dreams through scientific experiments. It's up to Miette and her circus strongman friend, One, to discover the fate of these children and end the activities of Monsieur Krank.

City or slum?

The animation, drawing, and coloration are handsome, the music and sound are fair, and the non-interactive sequences duplicate some of the eerie mood of surrealistic cinema. But the visual detail and engulfing atmosphere realized in a movie theater can't be sustained on a PC.

The gameplay in this graphic adventure never rises above mundane. It lacks the multiple endings of Titanic, the mind-bending puzzles of Timelapse, and the combination of logic and intuition required for Obsidian.

City is a very linear, object-manipulation kind of game. In addition, many of the objects you need are impossible to distinguish from the background images. The game also avoids the mouse completely in a deliberate attempt to enhance the mood.

Compounding this, some of the keyboard commands are a bit convoluted. Miette won't open a closed door with a direction key if she's standing in front of it—to do that, you hit Enter—but talking to a character standing in front of her requires Page Down. Go figure…

Don't get me wrong: The City of Lost Children is a far cut above the "let's-rip-off-a-movie" products that still appear periodically before dying a swift, deserved death. Scratch the game's surface, and it reveals some imaginative solutions to the problems associated with reducing movie graphics into computerized images. But scratch some more, and you find a perfectly ordinary graphic adventure at the core. —*Barry Brenesal*

THE CITY OF LOST CHILDREN

GAMEPLAY:	C+
GETTING STARTED:	B-
GRAPHICS:	B
SOUND CHECK:	B-
OVERALL	C+
MULTIPLAYER:	N/A

Intriguing, but it never quite captures the magic of the film.

DEVELOPER:	Psygnosis France
PUBLISHER:	Psygnosis 800-438-7794 www.psygnosis.com
PLATFORM:	DOS (runs under Win 95)
REQUIRES:	486DX2/66, 8MB RAM, 2X CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED:	P90, 16MB RAM, sound card
STREET PRICE:	$50

Golden Gate

This Chinatown alley holds a key to the mysteries of Golden Gate.

San Francisco is undeniably charming, both in a historical and modern sense; it's the reason so many people flock there to visit and live. Now, Panasonic Interactive Multimedia and ix Entertainment are betting that Golden Gate can tap into some of this audience—and it just may. Whether it holds them is another story.

This game is a weird melange of older technology framing a classic puzzle-based adventure that sees you traipsing the city's neighborhoods. You seek clues that are scattered throughout San Francisco for a lost treasure, using the classic find-and-use-objects formula. City history such as the 1906 earthquake/fire, landmarks like the famed beachfront restaurant Cliff House, Golden Gate Park, and Angel Island, and historical figures such as San Francisco legend Adolph Sutro (builder of the Cliff House) all figure into the plot. The puzzles, while no different from those you've seen in many of these games, are challenging and yield items that slowly form a cohesive whole. It'll take a while to play this one out.

San Francisco, travelogue-style

The plot's flavor captures the city well, and the graphics try their best. Unfortunately, the technology is what you'd expect from a game three years ago—blue-screen actors popping up against motionless backgrounds, flash-forward movement, and an odd mix of rendered backgrounds, some FMV, and watercolors. It doesn't look bad—some of the watercolors have a pleasant feel to them—but it's beneath what modern gamers expect.

Still, the *feel* of Golden Gate makes up, to some extent, for the technical shortcomings. It's a fun way to experience (or re-experience, if you will) some of the scenes and settings that make San Francisco what it is, without running out of breath on its many hills. And it is cheaper than most plane fares there... —*Don St. John*

GOLDEN GATE

GAMEPLAY:	B
GETTING STARTED:	B+
GRAPHICS:	C-
SOUND CHECK:	B
OVERALL	B-
MULTIPLAYER:	N/A

Beneath the outdated graphics, there's a decent travelogue/adventure.

DEVELOPER:	ix Entertainment
PUBLISHER:	Panasonic Interactive Multimedia 408-653-1888 www.goldengategame.com
PLATFORM:	Win 95/Mac CD
REQUIRES:	486DX2/66, 16MB RAM, 2X CD-ROM drive, mouse
RECOMMENDED:	Pentium
STREET PRICE:	$45

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Marble Drop

If you're the type of person who likes a good mind-bender, Maxis' Marble Drop will enchant you. This game gives you 50 different colorful puzzles that challenge your ability to follow the complex mechanics of their various setups.

Like the complicated setting of the board game Mouse Trap, Marble Drop invites you to decipher the various ramps and slides in which you drop the bright, multi-colored marbles. Little trapdoors and signal lights complicate things further, forcing you to think one step ahead of the mechanisms.

The graphics are vivid and lovely, reminiscent of the blueprints of a Renaissance inventor. Each puzzle gets progressively more intricate and creative, although the eventual goal is the same: get the mechanisms to work for you, so you can drop the marbles in the correct order.

One for the mechanically inclined

Those of you who can't even work a VCR may throw your hands up in frustration after dropping all the wrong marbles in a random pattern. But if you like machines and are fascinated by the way they work, you'll find Marble Drop a charming challenge.

—Christine Lam

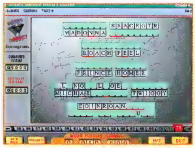
PUBLISHER:	Maxis
	800-336-2947
	www.maxis.com
PLATFORM:	Win 3.1/ Win 95 CD
SUGGESTED PRICE:	$30

B
OVERALL

Word Puzzles 1

Chew some mental cud

Doing a crossword over breakfast on a lazy Sunday morning is an icon of today's civilized adult life. Smart Games hopes that tradition will translate into doing a word puzzle at the computer instead of at the breakfast table. Word Puzzles 1 offers four different kinds of puzzles to keep you mentally occupied.



Word scrambles, word searches, and other types of mind-benders are endlessly paraded across your screen as you exclaim to yourself, "There's *how* many more?!"

For the most part, the puzzles are mundane time killers that begin to feel like work after about the first dozen. The graphics aren't much to look at, and the sound is inconsequential, but what'd you expect? They're word puzzles.

Although word puzzles keep your brain minimally occupied, especially on long commutes on public transportation or in the morning when your brain is just beginning to wake up, it's hard to believe anyone would look forward to plopping in front of the computer just to play them.

—Christine Lam

PUBLISHER:	Smart Games
	800-788-8815
	www.smart games.com
PLATFORM:	Win 3.1/Win 95 CD
SUGGESTED PRICE:	$30

C-
OVERALL

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Air Warrior II

Should've stayed online-only

By Steve "Pappy" Klett

Crashed. Killed in action. No victories. Zero assists. Group victories: 0. Group losses: 4. United States UN Fighter Cover survived with no losses. Mission status: Complete success! Say what?

Kesmai's stand-alone update to its perennial online flight sim is ambitious, to say the least. Unfortunately, it will leave you frustrated and scratching your head more times than you'll care to remember.

For instance, in this opening example of a mission report from a stand-alone mission, I was flying a MiG-15 for the North Korean air force against UN ground attack fighters. I died. My wingmen died. We failed to score a single kill. Nevertheless, the mission was judged a complete success.

This was in no way an isolated incident; I encountered all sorts of strange results in the Instant Action missions, stand-alone missions, and campaigns. Adding to the confusion is the sparse number of mission stats you get after completing—or at least thinking you completed—a mission.

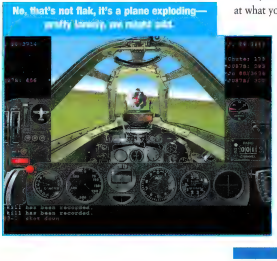
It's really too bad, since Air Warrior has a lot going for it on paper: There are 35 aircraft to fly from WWI, WWII, and the Korean War, 300 missions, and 6 campaigns. You also get connection software that lets you fly Air Warrior II against human opponents in mass furballs on CompuServe. (The package includes 20 free hours of online play, after which an hourly rate is charged.) There's also a mission editor that you can use to create your own stand-alone missions, or missions you want to bring online.

I-Magic's thrown in a few more extras as well: a keyboard reference card, a handy 140-page printed manual (an increasing rarity in today's flight sims), and a cheesy map of WWII Europe that's nice, but serves no useful purpose.

The game itself sports some cool photorealistic cockpit art (art for several planes is mysteriously absent for the highest, 1024-by-768 setting, however), and there are now three cockpit modes to choose from, including a full-screen view. However, when you look out of the canopy you'll be shocked at what you see, or rather, what you don't see:

Chuck Yeager's Air Combat on the Macintosh is what I'm reminded of, and how old is that game now? Sadly, Air Warrior II looks pretty tired.

Okay, so graphics aren't what you care most about; after all, Air Warrior II boasts "the most sophisticated AI and flight models" ever seen in a flight sim. I haven't flown a MiG-15, Fokker Triplane, or a Japanese Zero, so I'll have to give Kesmai the benefit of the doubt in the flight-model category—and in truth, each plane does have unique handling characteristics.



The AI, however, I have problems with. Yes, you can issue commands to your wingmen, flight, or air group on some missions, and yes, those orders are pretty much followed. Yet, after flying 20 or so campaign missions on the highest difficulty setting, "Ace," I found it strange that I was never shot down by enemy planes. Anti-aircraft fire appears to be your worst enemy, and when I did crash, more often than not it was due to my mistakes in the cockpit rather than actual combat. Plus, I know for a fact that a flight of B-17s can't outmaneuver a Focke Wulf or BF-109—but I was left constantly scratching my head as the big lumbering birds continually did just that.

If you look at Air Warrior II as merely a lot of offline practice time to hone your online skills, it may be a good value. Personally, it just left me scratching my head in bewilderment too many times. I mean, Internet and modem play are supported, but not network play. Say what?

AIR WARRIOR II

GAMEPLAY:	D+
GETTING STARTED:	B
GRAPHICS :	D
SOUND CHECK:	C-
MULTIPLAYER:	C+

C- OVERALL

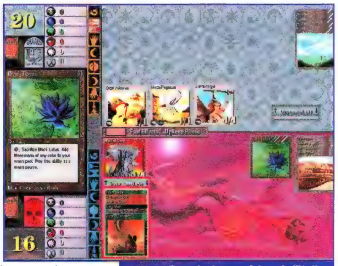
Lots of variety, and lots of holes.

DEVELOPER: Kesmai Corporation
PUBLISHER: Interactive Magic
800-789-1534
www.imagicgames.com
PLATFORM: Win 95 CD
REQUIRES: 486/66, 16MB RAM, 2X CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED: P90, 4X CD-ROM drive, joystick and rudder pedals
STREET PRICE: $50

TIPS ▼ When attacking American bomber formations, use head-on tactics to avoid the most concentrated defensive fire. Focus your fire on one bomber until it's history; this tactic definitely applies to B-17s, which can take a lot of punishment. You may only be able to bring one down in a given mission. ▼ Do not attempt sharp turns in the Focke Wulf. Do attempt sharp turns in the Spitfire.

Magic: The Gathering

By Rob Smith



Important, powerful cards like the Black Lotus and Serra Angel can make all the difference in tight duels.

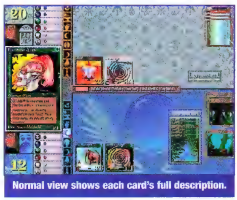
It's here, but it's not finished

At long, long last, MicroProse has finally shipped its eagerly awaited simulation of the amazingly popular card game Magic: The Gathering. It's a release plagued by delays and problems both in development and in court. The upshot is a game that manages to incorporate many elements of the original design specs, but omits the most glaringly obvious component: multiplayer options.

What is offered is a single-player role-playing game that uses a detailed model of the Magic rules to shape the game world and underscore the conflicts between dueling planeswalkers. You, naturally, are one of these planeswalkers, thrust into the midst of a turbulent time for the nation of Shandalar. This once-secure land has been torn apart by threats from dominating wizards intent upon bringing a dark age to the world. The powerful wizard Arzakon lies at the root of the current turmoil: He has managed to convince the lords of the five Guilds (each one representing one of the forces of mana) that they can achieve immortality by accruing the power to cast the Spell of Dominion. However, the real effect of the spell will be to destroy a magical barrier that will leave the way open for him to bring darkness to everyone.

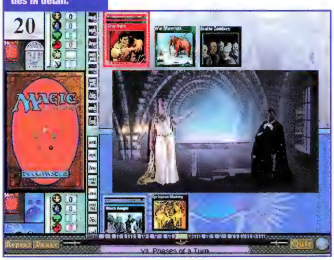
Only an old witch has discovered this scurrilous plot, and she informs a wandering, amateur planeswalker. Guess who? And so you have the future of Shandalar resting in your magical hands. The task ahead is to roam the land, develop your dueling powers, and confront each of the Guild Lords in their castles. You use the spellcasting card game of Magic to duke it out.

Never heard of Magic? Fear not—there's plenty of help at hand. A hefty 210-page manual covers the basics, and an adequate online help function during gameplay will answer most of your questions. Faced with a bunch of options after installation, beginners should head for the duel and practice with a few one-on-one contests using the numerous supplied pre-built decks. Experienced card gamers can re-create their own decks from the current, Fourth Edition release of cards, with a bunch of extras thrown in (including the Black Lotus) and 12 original, all-new "Astral" cards.



Normal view shows each card's full description.

The tutorial, given by two wizards, goes through the game's technicalities in detail.



In these one-on-one confrontations using the preset decks, the four levels of computer AI are distinctive and extremely challenging at higher levels. But import your own deck and ask the computer to play that against any other of your choosing or creation, and weaknesses emerge. For instance, on several occasions, the computer used the powerful Black Lotus spell incorrectly, causing mana burn on itself (the effect when you invoke a mana point, but then don't use it); in the Magic world, that's unforgivable. It seems that the AI has been precisely designed around the supplied decks but will struggle when asked to play a user-created deck. To be fair, MicroProse does claim that the faster the processor, the greater the AI's ability to calculate its options in the allotted time. (Playing on a P150, the computer AI did seem to make more mistakes than on a P200.)

The main focus of Magic is the role-playing adventure. It's presented on an isometric-view map of Shandalar that isn't very impressive to look at—the designs don't match the high standard of the original card art depicted elsewhere in the game. On the map, you wander around from town to town, picking up quests, buying and selling cards, listening to wise men and eating—a hero's got to stay healthy, you know.

Outside of the towns, the countryside is crawling with the minions of Guild Lords, all looking for other wizards to supply them with the spells they need to further their bosses' immortal intentions. When wizards meet and prepare to duel, an ante is placed—one card selected at random from the wizards' deck—and it is for this that they fight. Naturally, it's in your interest to win duels to gain the extra cards; those then build your deck to be power-

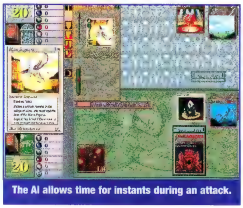
As you wander the world of Shandalar, stick to the roads and earn cash by trading cards in areas where those colors are rare. Use this cash to pay off wizards you don't want to fight.

ful enough to give the dominating Lords a run for their money.

Other nuances add to this overly simplistic concept. Defeated wizards may be good sports and offer you help and rewards for your conduct; others aren't so friendly, and may hinder your next duel. In addition, randomly appearing sites may house powerful wizards you really want to avoid, or free spells. But the most powerful spells are located in very cheesy-looking dungeons, the locations of which you need to unearth by defeating other wizards and listening to them spill their inside information. Be warned, though: Don't head to these dungeons in search of great riches without a powerful deck. They can hide some fearfully powerful occupants with decks that can destroy you in the space of a few turns.

Duel white and green wizards first—they're weaker. Don't duel when the ante is too high.

In many instances, you'll get the chance to pay gold to avoid fighting, which is particularly useful if you don't want to risk paying the price of the ante card should you lose. When you do enter a duel, the screen switches to what is essentially a tabletop. The computer acts as referee and the opposing wizard, formally going through the six-phased game turn and allowing time for you to play the crucial interrupts and instants spell effects (such as fireballs, disintegrate spells, and other damage- inflicters and preventers) that are the key to success.



The AI allows time for instants during an attack.

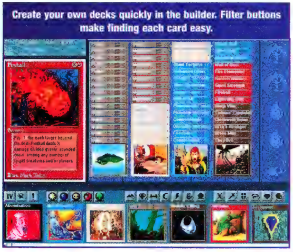
There are problems, though. You'll need to be careful when clicking on your lands to tap mana; occasionally the card tapped, storing the mana for use, but didn't register in the spell cost. Tapping but not using the mana causes mana burn, or self-inflicted damage. This actually caused my wizard to commit suicide on two incredibly frustrating occasions.

What Magic: The Gathering currently offers is a very decent single-player option for Magic players to enjoy without calling on friends. That said, the lack of even LAN or modem play is a severe disappointment. In a game where the intelligence and ability of the opponent are key, surely it would have been easier to create the network interface for multiplayer games to occur and let the thousands of gamers out there supply the AI. MicroProse's embarrassment about this omission is evident in parts of the manual, including Magic creator Richard Garfield's introduction, which tries to put an overly positive spin on the single-player element; elsewhere there are mentions of add-ons and expansions that aren't available "yet."

For me, though, the very fact that I could play Magic (and will play Magic) without digging out those valuable cards and calling on a few buddies was welcome. I can test out my actual card deck against other styles in the deck builder and experiment with other additional cards that I may end up deciding are worth purchasing. For this alone, Magic could be a very valuable asset for serious card collectors, but they'll have to contend with certain unfortunate AI quirks (usually in your favor, but that's not the point of the exercise).

Bring on the add-ons and expansions.

Create your own decks quickly in the builder. Filter buttons make finding each card easy.



MAGIC: THE GATHERING

GAMEPLAY:	B+
GETTING STARTED:	B
GRAPHICS:	B
SOUND CHECK:	B-
OVERALL	B

MULTIPLAYER: N/A (DOH!)

Magic fans will want it...but they'll also want more.

PUBLISHER:	MicroProse 800-879-7529 www.microprose.com
PLATFORM:	Win 95 CD
REQUIRES:	486/100, 16MB RAM, 2X CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED:	P120, SVGA, 4X CD-ROM drive, sound card
STREET PRICE:	$50

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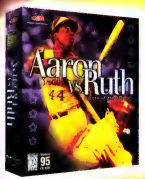

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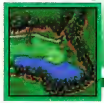


Jack Nicklaus 4

Golden Bear, golden game

By Daniel Morris

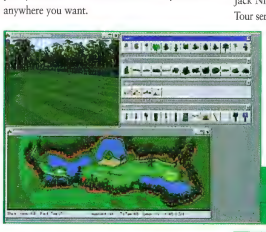
The Golden Bear has lent his name to the well-received Signature Edition series for a few years now, but the latest of Accolade's golf titles is its greatest achievement yet on the electronic links. Amid the bumper crop of golf games that will be arriving this year, Jack Nicklaus 4 has been a long time in coming, but it stands out immediately and demands notice.

Little touches to the graphics make the game a visual treat, with things like ball washers, garbage cans, and cart paths. This detail seeps beyond the graphics, too, allowing you to tailor your golfing experience to your tastes. Are you a lefty? You can play as a left-handed golfer. Want to position the camera to watch the shot from any location and height? It's simple. Want to tee off into early-morning fog and then stroll in the sun as the morning wears on? You can predetermine changing fog levels.

But the most addictive aspect of this package is the fantastic course designer, which gives you total freedom to take on Jack at his own game—building killer golf courses of your own.

Jack Nicklaus 4 was designed with hands-on help from Nicklaus' Golden Bear Design Group, which helped Accolade render four of Jack's most famous real-life designs and supplied a fifth course as an exclusive to the game. They also helped perfect the course designer.

This fine utility allows easy and instant creation of the course of your dreams. You have complete control over length, elevation, placement, and types of trees, water hazards, doglegs, and breaks on greens. Better yet, you can tweak your holes and the screen will redraw your change almost instantly, allowing you to tailor your course without any irritating waits for a new rendering. A completely controllable camera shows the layout from anywhere you want.



Like a kid in the playpen with all his blocks: the course designer in glorious action.

Tee off into an early-morning fog, and set the fog to burn off by a predetermined hole to finish out the round in sunshine.

Once you've given your course a suitably golfy name, like mine, Soaring Pines, take your clubs and try to tame it. An Accolade Web site will house individually created courses and allow you to post yours, as well as organize matches with other online golfers on any of the player-generated courses. Aries Online Games is the exclusive licensee of the game for online play.

Sound great? Well, then why isn't it on the A-List? I'll tell you. As good as the game is and as addictive as its course designer is, it's just too easy. After spending just a few hours playing Jack Nicklaus 4, I was able to break par for the round. Within a few days, I could shoot a 65 or 66 playing as an Amateur from the back tees, playing in wind, with no mulligans or gimmies. By comparison, Links LS is still tough after months of play. Jack Nicklaus 4 is more reminiscent of the PGA Tour series, where your onscreen presence can hit, aim, and shape shots like a pro.

Which is not to say that it isn't fun; it's just not terribly demanding. The fact remains that Jack Nicklaus 4 is a wonderful way to spend an hour a day, soaking in an incredibly beautiful rendition of an elegant Golden Bear–designed course.

With Accolade hatching tournaments and prize structures, and with the already fervent Signature Edition following ready to pounce on the course designer, there promises to be plenty for digital duffers to sink their teeth into once they pick up Jack Nicklaus 4.

JACK NICKLAUS 4

GAMEPLAY:	B+
GETTING STARTED:	B+
GRAPHICS:	A-
SOUND CHECK:	B
OVERALL	**B+**
MULTIPLAYER:	**B**

As good a golf game as we're likely to see this year.

PUBLISHER:	Accolade 800-245-7744 www.accolade.com
PLATFORM:	Win 95 CD
REQUIRES:	P90, 16MB RAM, SVGA
RECOMMENDED:	P133, sound card
STREET PRICE:	$50

TIPS

▼ Most holes have a ballout area where you can safely lay up short of the green. If you're not confident about your approach shots, think about landing a soft one there and then chipping onto the green. ▼ Consider chipping with a 7-iron and arcing the shot so it goes high and then stops just short of the hole on flat greens. This will let you stop the ball and draw it back without your having to worry about rolling way past the cup. ▼ Be sure to carry a lob wedge in your bag. It can save you a bunch of shots when you're forced to lob onto an elevated green.

Into the Void

By Barry Brenesal

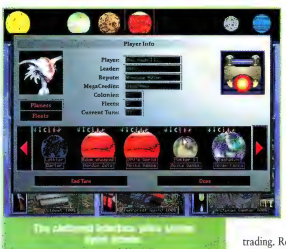
Most of the human-looking beings from this story screens

It's rare for a heavyweight space strategy to come out of the blue, but that's truly the case here. Unheralded, Into the Void enters a congested field already dominated by the likes of Master of Orion II and Star General—and holds its own. How many times have strategy-based games announced, "You can win by diplomacy, colonization, combat or research"? Plenty. And, of those, option (e), All of the above, is the usual requirement.

There's some life in this galaxy

But Into the Void allows success in any of those categories. The winner is the player who receives the highest rating from his people, and points are awarded for different activities according to racial preferences. For example, while the Terrans value colonization and combat, the Sochan (a visual cross between a chili pepper and Homer Simpson) prefer research, and reward a scientific leader.

The game neither animates the six different species nor provides race-specific music, fonts or messages. The AI is good, yet imaginative visual touches that would bring each group to life are lacking. But since you get to choose game difficulty, galaxy size, star density, playing mode (stand-alone, network, or e-mail), and number of players (2 to 10), Into the Void still offers plenty of diversity.



The different interface styles within Void screens

Into the Void's graphics provoke a mixed reaction. The basic artwork is excellent, but the thin green text font is difficult to read quickly, making it tough to notice additions to your race's database. While the information surpasses MOO II's detail by including the survey team findings for each planet, I miss the presence of full-screen backdrops for important submenus. There's one for ship design but none for research, production, military units or intelligence—just text-based dialog boxes on top of the already overly busy main planetary screen.

My other concern centers around the non-standard interface commands. By convention, F1 brings up Help, Esc backs you out of a screen (or brings up an Options menu), and double-clicking retrieves the standard menu for the clicked object. None of these commands work in Into the Void. Right-clicking calls a circle of animated icons for various functions like Help and Diplomacy. Ship Design is here as well, but nothing is hot-keyed.

Diplomacy options are limited: you can set up peace treaties and alliances or declare war. There's no trading. Research is fairly extensive, though, with more than two dozen technologies to learn or upgrade—and here's the kicker: you'll need rarer minerals as your upgrades become more advanced. This means developing faster-than-light spaceships and colonizing marginally inhabitable planets to bring home those precious isotopes.

Does that mean a high learning curve? Nope. Into the Void includes 32 tutorials on a range of topics—how to travel between stars, how to research, and more—and most of them feature multiple steps with excellent annotations.

With a standard interface and improved graphics, this sim would have received an unqualified round of applause. As it is, Into the Void is still an exciting, highly configurable game of interplanetary strategic conquest, exploration, and research. It's a keeper.

Prepare ships by designing the vessels using the Void's interface

INTO THE VOID

GAMEPLAY:	A-
GETTING STARTED:	B
GRAPHICS:	B-
SOUND CHECK:	C+
MULTIPLAYER:	B

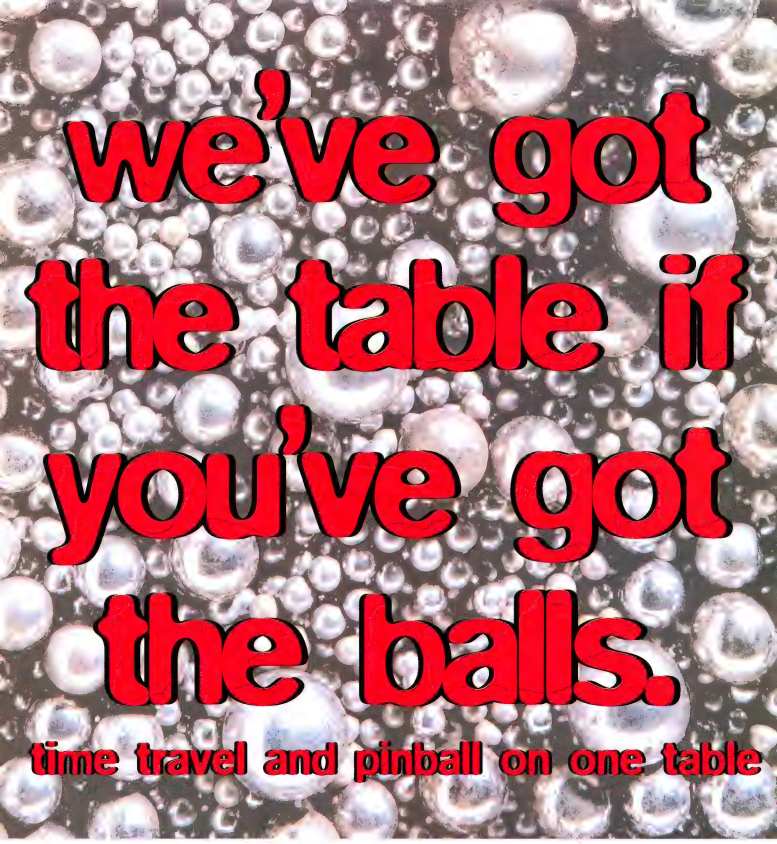
B
OVERALL

Indifferent graphics and an unconventional interface can't hide an excellent strategic space sim.

Developer:	Adrenalin Entertainment/ Electric Moo Products
Publisher:	Playmates Interactive Entertainment 714-428-2112 www.playmatestoys.com
Platform:	DOS 6.0/Win 95 CD
Required:	486DX, 8MB RAM, 2X CD-ROM drive, mouse
Recommended:	Pentium, 16MB RAM, 4X CD-ROM drive
Street price:	$50

TIPS

▼ Start your first game with the Kimmer. They're the least annoying to the other races, letting you get a feel for the game without hordes of pesky, bomb-dropping alien ships appearing on your doorstep. ▼ Research an agri dome as soon as you can. They generate a lot more food, freeing up additional settlers for tasks like research or colonization. ▼ Avoid breaking treaties whenever possible. Knowledge of this act spreads quickly, making it much more difficult to form treaties with any race in the future. ▼ Only one ship in a group needs to possess the bulky faster-than-light drive to travel quickly to another star system. ▼ Always leave a few intelligence units close to home, in case another race tries to steal research information. ▼ Initially, don't bother working on your ground-troop strength. You need to research and build first.



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Emperor of the Fading Suns

By Daniel Morris

Starfleets use Jumpgates to maneuver through the known worlds.

There seems to be enough new space-conquest games to populate several galaxies. Most of them are depressingly familiar Master of Orion knockoffs that leave sci-fi addicts, who love to sink their teeth into a powerful space epic, wanting more.

That's why it's such a pleasure to get lost in Emperor of the Fading Suns, a fully developed game universe of incredible depth and richness. EFS manages to avoid the two traps that swallow many of its competitors: It's neither so detailed that it ceases to be playable and

The command of each planet is resolved via turn-by-turn military actions.

Not just another space-conquest sim

fun, nor so short-sighted as to leave out the involvement that sells a story.

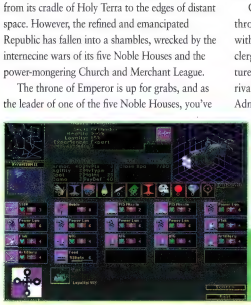
It is the year 4550, the dawn of mankind's Second Dark Age. After thousands of years of exploration and colonization, humanity reaches from its cradle of Holy Terra to the edges of distant space. However, the refined and emancipated Republic has fallen into a shambles, wrecked by the internecine wars of its five Noble Houses and the power-mongering Church and Merchant League.

The throne of Emperor is up for grabs, and as the leader of one of the five Noble Houses, you've got your sights on it. To claim it, you'll need to be not only a master military strategist, but a cunning diplomat and attentive administrator as well.

EFS is essentially a political game, couched in the grandest frills of Frank Herbert's *Dune*. Its dark, Gothic style lends the action a grim Shakespearean mask. The gorgeous, operatic music and neo-medieval visual design, full of cathedrals and scepters, make for a very rich and compelling environment.

Guiding your Noble House toward the throne, you cut deals with the other nobles and with high officials among the merchants and clergy. By offering your vote in exchange for future consideration, you can cash in favors from rival nobles (such as an appointment to Fleet Admiral, which greatly strengthens your starfleet). Kiss up to the merchants to secure inexpensive goods. Attract the benevolence or ire of the Church by either signing or refusing a writ advocating the Church's right to crown the new Emperor.

All this politicking greases your way to military expansion, as you absorb neighboring planets into your domain. Each planet is represented by a large map with key cities and resource deposits. Your invasion of these neutral worlds is accomplished with a wide, interesting variety of combat infantry, artillery, and vehicles. Once a planet is yours, you must administer it successfully, culling resources and harvesting food; failure to keep the planet ship-shape leads to partisan rebellions or famines. Then there's the matter of the inexplicable "living plague" of symbiont aliens that is infesting planet after planet along the periphery of known space…



Battle screens and fleets have a huge variety of unit types.

For all its wonderful detail and interesting features, EFS still doesn't top MOO II. While MOO II completely absorbs you with every aspect of its gameplay, with EFS, you never really lose the feeling that each feature is simply bringing you closer to a piecemeal solution to the game.

But there's an awful lot to do here, and a lot of depth to explore. EFS takes the most addictive resource-development qualities of Civilization and weds them with the most intriguing technological and political elements of MOO II to create an interesting, highly playable game.

EMPEROR OF THE FADING SUNS

GAMEPLAY:	B
GETTING STARTED:	B
GRAPHICS:	B+
SOUND CHECK:	B+

B+
OVERALL

MULTIPLAYER: B

Plenty of depth and a captivating environment make this sim shine.

DEVELOPER:	Holistic Design
PUBLISHER:	SegaSoft 888-734-2763 www.segasoft.com
PLATFORM:	Win 95 CD
REQUIRES:	486DX3/66, 16MB RAM, DirectX-compatible video card, 2X CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED:	Pentium, sound card
STREET PRICE:	$45

TIPS

▼ Consider granting religious control over your population to the Church. This can be a great source of cash flow, particularly if you're careful about skimming the tithe. ▼ Don't get hung up on being elected Regent in the game's first stages. Instead, lobby for appointment to lesser posts like Fleet Admiral, which grants you temporary control over the awesome Imperial armada.

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Star Command: Revolution

By Peter Olafson

It was only a matter of time before real-time strategy-game designers were going to get stars in their eyes and aim for something loftier.

GT Interactive's Star Command: Revolution is the first of these C&C-in-space epics to reach the market, beating out Blizzard's Starcraft, and it's a decent if ultimately less-than-compelling variation on its Earthbound cousins. Indeed, that's part of the problem.

You're running a secret military Terran outfit that's battling the forces of the mysterious warlord

Narvek (ever notice the shortage of mysterious warlords named "Joe Bob"?). Your side consists of three conquered alien races—Nomads, Triumverites, and Computrons—and the remaining Terrans, which makes operations a bit complicated: You've got four separate technologies to tackle, both from the fighting side and, eventually, from the building side.

Working with a single, irreplaceable mothership from a not-so-cozy little corner of space, you gather resources, learn new technologies, and build spacecraft—up to 60 of 'em, ranging from scouts and battlewagons to aircraft carriers. You can play one of 10 scenarios or go for a huge campaign game instead. Either option can be played against four human opponents via an IPX network or the Internet.

You start out exploring, and eventually you'll penetrate the blue fog that envelopes your base and bump up against a neighbor. The neighbor is certain to bump back, and it's here that things get interesting. Graphicswise, Star Command's combat is a little like being inside a multi-directional 2D shoot-'em-up. But, in fact, it's more realistic than other games of this type. One common failing of computer games is they don't accommodate intermediate states of being: A unit is either alive and in full possession of its faculties, or it's dead. There's typically little or no room in between.

Star Command is the first game I've seen in this genre that reduces a unit's performance—not simply its strength—according to the damage it has taken. The game monitors not just a unit's shields, but engine damage (the unit moves more slowly), tech damage (the unit fires more slowly), and control damage. Admittedly, keeping track of all this in the middle of a multi-ship conflagration is a daunting task, but it's the end result that's meaningful. It *feels* right.

By the same token, Star Command gives units credit for experience (which you can boost, within limits, by placing units adjacent to a university). That's no longer a new idea—it's incorporated in KKND and 7th Legion—but it's one that seems particularly relevant to Star Command. And it's not simply a nice little touch; it's a theme integral to the game mechanics. You can build attack craft that inflict certain specific types of damage, and build repair craft that patch it up.

Yet there's something missing from Star Command at the concept level that would have given the move off-planet some meaning. Basically, it's still a clone. I'm not persuaded that a 2D map is the right way to carry out combat in a 3D world.

The real-time wars explore space

And while few of us have been in space, it's safe to say it's not broken up by….well, for want of a better description, fields of fungus and broken-down stone walls. This isn't space combat; it's an animated Dali-esque painting. It may be pretty, but it's artifice, and that goes against Star Command's rational grain.

STAR COMMAND: REVOLUTION

GAMEPLAY:	B-
GETTING STARTED:	B+
GRAPHICS:	B
SOUND CHECK:	B
OVERALL	B-
MULTIPLAYER:	B

Clone, yes—but not without its merits.

DEVELOPER:	Metropolis Digital
PUBLISHER:	GT Interactive
	800-821-4847
	www.gtinteractive.com
PLATFORM:	DOS 5.0/Win 95 CD
REQUIRED:	486/66, 8MB RAM, SVGA, 2X CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED:	Pentium, 16MB RAM
STREET PRICE:	$50

TIPS

▼ The old lure-them-out technique from Doom works well in Star Command. Send in a unit to draw out the enemy and allow them to pursue it back to your base, which should be protected by a wall of rocket launchers. Sit back, and watch the fur fly.

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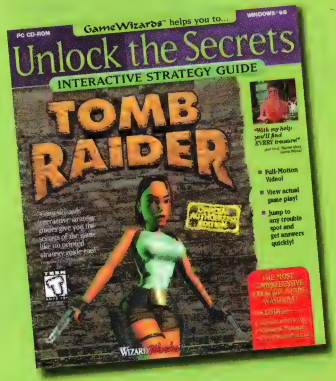

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Settlers II Gold Edition

In our review some issues back, I made it pretty clear that The Settlers II—a deeply addictive "God" sim—was about the most fun you could have with your pants on.

Now they've made it better. The Gold Edition incorporates the much-requested map editor and a raft of new worlds to conquer—including our own.

The Settlers have returned, and they've brought their tools with them

These lands writhe with activity, and come complete with their own little eccentricities, which isn't really a problem. So strong is the pull of those industrious little folk that the oddities of combat and road building come to seem endearing.

What the original release lacked was the ability to put your personal stamp on the game, and the editor takes care of that. The multi-windowed landscape builder is a pleasure to use—and a real challenge to use well. Creating a world that's at once provocative and well-balanced will keep you tweaking and finessing into the wee hours.

Now the only issue remaining is beefing up the multiplayer mode: It supports two players on one machine, but that's it. Platinum, anyone?

—Peter Olafson

Publisher:	Blue Byte
	847-995-9981
	www.blueByte.com
Platform:	DOS CD
Street Price:	$50

A- OVERALL

Lights Out

Flip that switch

The computer version of the original hand-held game attempts to deliver a more interesting visual range to justify its more high-tech form. Yet, sadly, the gameplay is identical.

For those not familiar with the original Lights Out, the game has you select buttons until you can turn off all of the lighted buttons. However, when one button is selected, the button either goes on or off, the opposite of its previous state, taking the surrounding buttons with it. It's hard to explain, but it really is quite simple.

The computer version of the game doesn't promise much more than the original, although it allows you to save your position, as well as scroll through your previous puzzles.

Because the game concept is so simple and repetitive, Tiger tries to mix things up a bit by changing the objects that are being turned off and on. However, merely choosing other objects only slightly diffuses the fact that this is still the exact same game. The more portable original has a definite foot up on the computer version because of its convenience.

—Christine Lam

Publisher:	Tiger Interactive
	847-913-8100
	www.tigertoys.com
Platform:	Win 3.1/Win 95 CD
Street Price:	$35

B- OVERALL

Duke It Out in D.C.

Shock, horror, fright! Those alien scum have kidnapped the President and taken over the Capitol. Naturally, Duke Nukem comes to the rescue as he battles through nine new levels (plus one bonus secret level) through such familiar locations as the White House, the Smithsonian Museum, the Lincoln Memorial, and more. WizardWorks even sent a team to video these places so they could re-create them in great detail.

No one steals our President—and lives!

This add-on pack doesn't feature any new monsters, new weapons or key enhancements, but it does supply 10 large, challenging levels presented with some new, highly detailed textures. All the levels are expansive and take a great deal of time to fight through. The designs are pretty well-put-together, but you'll need to do plenty of searching, back-tracking, and map-using to locate all the keys and then re-find the doors that they unlock.

The story and the flow through the Capitol are seamlessly integrated, and it's quite easy to lose several hours blasting about. Solid, entertaining, but not breath-taking.

—Rob Smith

Publisher:	GT Interactive
	800-610-4847
	www.gtinter active.com
Platform:	DOS CD
Street Price:	$20

B- OVERALL

Quiz Wiz Cyber Trivia

Trivia gone wrong

With the success of the YOU DON'T KNOW JACK series, you have to expect other hopeful developers to step up to bat. Tiger Electronics' Quiz Wiz Cyber Trivia needs to be sent back to Little League.

For one thing, the entire game is riddled with entirely outdated youth stereotypes in the hopes of making it more hip. It fails, and it fails big. Your guide to the game is "Wise Guy," an annoying plaid-wearing, backwards-cap-sporting grungester who's always ready with a lame quip. There's an off-switch for Wise Guy in the setup; I suggest you use it.

While you're at it, shut off the sound, too.

Even more embarrassing are the blatant typos in the questions and the occasional lack of response to your mouse button—often, you have to hit it several times. The questions vary in difficulty, although it's hard to believe that most kids will know the answers, contrary to what the "ages 8 & up" would indicate.

—Christine Lam

Publisher:	Tiger Interactive
	847-913-8100
	www.tiger toys.com
Platform:	Win 3.1/Win 95 CD
Street Price:	$35

D- OVERALL

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Krazy Ivan

Alien robots appear every few seconds, dispatching powerups and hostages when blown away.

Attack of the Russian renegade

Highlighting the growing band of console-style arcade/action games comes Krazy Ivan. It's an odd translation, given that I don't recall the original PlayStation version as being all that good, yet I found the PC version extremely fun, if shallow stuff. Take control of Krazy Ivan and his awfully big mech, plant yourself down in various alien-infested warzones, and just blow things up while rescuing hostages, gathering powerups, and hunting down boss robots.

A Windows 95 game, Krazy Ivan will run in a window or in full-screen, but it's a shame that the game wasn't given a real hi-res overhaul (especially with 3D acceleration). It looks pretty good, but it definitely could have looked better, and there are plenty of blocky textures. Likewise, the game supports only two-player head-to-head mode, with options for IPX, TCP/IP, and modem connections. The lack of both graphic upgrades and more expansive multiplayer options gives it more than a slight "ported-over" feel (the PlayStation version supported two players via linkup), but the control feels a bit better on the PC, and the action is suitably mindless and near-constant.

Another oddly enjoyable part of Krazy Ivan is the cinematic sequences. Intentionally over-the-top in an obnoxiously arrogant, tongue-in-cheek sort of way, these scenes contain some of the only genuinely humorous and watchable FMV I've seen in a game. Krazy Ivan isn't deep, complex, or innovative, and it doesn't come close to the intense, sim-like action and greatness of MechWarrior 2, but it still ends up being a lot of cheap, arcade-style fun.

—Jason D'Aprile

KRAZY IVAN

GAMEPLAY:	B+
GETTING STARTED:	A-
GRAPHICS:	B-
SOUND CHECK:	B

B- OVERALL

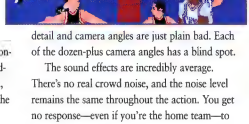
MULTIPLAYER: B-

Simple, cheap, and fun.

DEVELOPER:	Tantalus Entertainment
PUBLISHER:	Psygnosis 800-438-7794 www.psygnosis.com
PLATFORM:	Win 95 CD
REQUIRES:	P60, 8MB RAM, 2X CD-ROM drive, mouse
RECOMMENDED:	P90, 16MB RAM, sound card
STREET PRICE:	$30

NCAA Final Four

Nobody's going to go wild over this dunk.



Let this one ride the pine

As March Madness approaches, Mindscape has picked up GTE Entertainment's NCAA Basketball license to get Final Four on the shelves. Unlucky us.

This unimaginative, mediocre game wouldn't even get off the bench against the market's best basketball sims. Final Four is your run-of-the-mill, plain-looking basketball game.

There are more than 50 teams to choose from, with all the squads from major conferences, such as the ACC, SEC, and Big-Ten. But several teams from the big conferences, including Mississippi, Mississippi State, and New Mexico, didn't make the final cut.

You can play an exhibition game, a season, or go right to the tournament. Up to four people can play at once on one PC, but players three and four will have to use a mouse and the keyboard to join the action.

Some of the graphics are actually pretty good. The players' movements are fairly realistic, but the detail and camera angles are just plain bad. Each of the dozen-plus camera angles has a blind spot.

The sound effects are incredibly average. There's no real crowd noise, and the noise level remains the same throughout the action. You get no response—even if you're the home team—to dunks or scoring runs.

Other glitches add to the frustration. The ball seems to never get above the rim: even when you score, it looks like it hits the bottom of the net. Rebounding is another problem, since the ball tends to bounce to the ground and come to a complete stop. Even if you get your man near the ball, it takes a couple of seconds before he can pick it up.

On top of everything else, neither side misses much. Even on the toughest setting, I made 8 out of every 10 shots. Talk about unrealistic.

Final Four needs a major overhaul before it can compete with top basketball sims like NBA Live '97. In the meantime, it gives new meaning to "March Madness."

—Andrew Miller

NCAA FINAL FOUR

GAMEPLAY:	D
GETTING STARTED:	B
GRAPHICS:	C+
SOUND CHECK:	D

C- OVERALL

MULTIPLAYER: C-

This game doesn't live up to the competition.

DEVELOPER:	High-Voltage Software
PUBLISHER:	Mindscape 800-234-3088 www.mindscapegames.com
PLATFORM:	Win 95 CD
REQUIRES:	486DX/66, 8MB RAM, 2X CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED:	16MB RAM, 4X CD-ROM drive
STREET PRICE:	$35

Test Drive: Off-Road

A Chevy in your sights, and the whole countryside as your speedway.

Accolade's Test Drive series has, along with The Need for Speed, earned its keep by obtaining hot vehicle licenses for adaptation into the game. Now, Test Drive moves off-road to put you behind the wheel of four vehicles designed to handle any terrain.

All the speed, hold the asphalt

The Hummer, Jeep Wrangler, Chevy K-1500 Z71, and Land Rover Defender 90 all come complete with accurate physics models. Each performs realistically on the 12 tracks, which feature races through snow, desert, rock, and dirt courses. While the vehicles may handle authentically, the licensing requires that they suffer no performance degradation, so slam 'em into as many trees as you like and they won't miss a beat (though Accolade did manage to talk Jeep into letting the Wrangler roll, which had been a point of contention).

As detailed as the physics models may be, this is still purely arcade entertainment. The available race modes are Single, Season, and Class and Mixed Leagues. But the differing difficulty levels are achieved simply by having one more computer opponent play "for realsies" instead of mildly hanging back and letting you catch up. There really isn't much of interest until you get into the multiplayer aspect.

Playable over network, modem, and in split-screen on a single machine, Test Drive: Off-Road is enough of a diversion. The problem is that it just doesn't have enough or do enough to make you want to come back to it again and again. Once you've found the hidden shortcuts on the 12 tracks, there's nothing new or different about the experience. Eventually, you find yourself going out of the way to roll your Jeep, just for the hell of it, and forget all about the race.

Gravity Kills supplies the music (not original songs), but the sound of the game is your typical vroom-and-boom action racing soundtrack.

Test Drive: Off-Road is recommended for fans of arcade racers who are interested less in the aerodynamics of a NASCAR contender and wonder more about how steep a hill has to be before a Hummer just flat out slides off. Big-engined amusement, but not much else. *—Daniel Morris*

TEST DRIVE: OFF-ROAD

GAMEPLAY:	C+
GETTING STARTED:	A
GRAPHICS:	B
SOUND CHECK:	C
OVERALL	**B-**
MULTIPLAYER:	**B**

The time-honored Test Drive series gets dirty.

PUBLISHER:	Accolade 800-245-7744 www.accolade.com
PLATFORM:	DOS CD (runs under Windows)
REQUIRES:	P90, 16MB RAM, 2X CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED:	P133
STREET PRICE:	$40

Ark of Time

Too bad the game doesn't live up to its graphic appeal.

Perhaps Koei should stick to those number-crunching historical wargames on which it made its name: Its first attempt at a straight graphic adventure is a decidedly weak and dated effort. Ark of Time needs to wind its watch.

It goes like this: A professor who promised the editor of your London newspaper a story on a great archaeological find has vanished in the Caribbean, and you've been dispatched on the company plane to find him.

Almost immediately, things go wrong. The plot proves the usual collection of mid-'90s computer-game quackery: Easter Island, Stonehenge, Atlantis, etc. How many times has *this* been done?

The reading of the lines sounds like just that—reading rather than acting—and it's not even a *good* reading. It's full of strange inflections, as if this was the first time the voice actor had seen his lines. It never quite settles on a tone, and as a result, fails to earn our sympathy or interest.

Then again, it's only slightly worse than the game text, whose occasionally ungrammatical English and lapses in continuity suggest an inept translation.

The humor is murky to non-existent. The puzzles are occasionally irrational, and, in one case, rather cruel: You lure an unfriendly cat with milk and throw her onto a high ledge to secure use of her owner's ladder. The game's as emotionally cold as its 3D-modeled characters, and there's no atmosphere whatsoever.

There had to be an upside for this game to be made, and there is: Ark looks brilliant. The backdrops have a wonderful luminous quality that's just a touch short of photorealism. The husky-voiced lady painter in the Caribbean village square is brought off superbly.

Atlantis again?

The game ran without a hitch. And I appreciate the spare, precise installation routine. But you know you're playing a mediocre game when the install routine is one of its strong points. *—Peter Olafson*

ARK OF TIME

GAMEPLAY:	D
GETTING STARTED:	D+
GRAPHICS :	A-
SOUND CHECK:	B
OVERALL	**D**
MULTIPLAYER:	**N/A**

Beauty without, problems within.

DEVELOPER:	Ice
PUBLISHER:	Koei 415-348-0200 www.koeigames.com
PLATFORM:	DOS CD
REQUIRES:	486DX, 8MB RAM, 2X CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED:	Pentium, 4X CD-ROM drive
STREET PRICE:	$35

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Whether on the ice, in the 'Drome, on the road, or in the reaches of space, some days we can all use a little helping hand. This month's cheats will make it a little easier to slip one past the goalie, sink a belligerent sub, and lay claim to a hotly contested war-world.

G-NOME

It may be the future, but the objective of war hasn't changed...kill your enemy until he is dead! dead! dead! Here's how to do it the quick way, plus a few cookies for the curious.

Press Ctrl-F1 at the main screen to bring up a box in which you can type any of the following codes (which are anagrams of the names of the development team):

Redtop Trod: Opens missions list to all missions under Game-New-Missions.

Horny Elk Leer: Allows maximum-range radar.

Rotted Drop: Enables **Ctrl-F**, which gives heavy damage to whatever is targeted, usually killing it.

Oh No! Less Japan: Enables **Ctrl-X**, which gives the ion-strike weapon to the HAWC you're in.

Had a Nude On: Enables **Ctrl-I**, which makes your HAWC invincible. (You must enter Ctrl-I each time you switch HAWCs.)

Half Libel: Enables **Ctrl-B**, which teleports you near the selected waypoint or target.

Brass Clue: Enables **Ctrl-Z**, which resupplies your ammo.

Swiss Throat: Turns the Citadel building into 7th Level headquarters. Inside are pictures of the artists and programmers; hitting **Tab** cycles through all of them. The quickest way to get to the Citadel is to host a one-player Net game of King of the Hill.

Mother Mourn Us: In Mission 1-5, it makes a mountain turn into Mt. Rushmore, albeit with the programmers' faces.

O'Sarge: The sergeant in the training missions speaks with an Irish accent.

Dunk It Here: Plays outtakes from recording sessions.

A Scramble On: Allows wallpaper capture using the standard **Shift-Ctrl-right-click** mechanism.

Note: Cheats are case-sensitive, and work in single-player games only. A "ding" will sound if the code has been entered correctly.

NHL '97

It's Stanley Cup playoff time. As the Canadian GNP sags, we offer a few friendly cheats to add a little oomph to your lineup. Better than a phalanx of Russian prospects!

Press Shift and type WAGD to enable cheats:

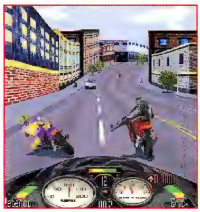
H: Home team scores goal.
V: Visiting team scores goal.
P: Ends period.
G: Ends game.
O: Goes to overtime.
I: Causes an injury.
F: Causes a fight.
T: Shrinks players. (*Press **Shift-T** to enlarge them.*)
1: Two-minute penalty is called.
2: Four-minute penalty is called.
4: Five-minute penalty is called.
5: Penalty shot.

Road Rash

Would-be road warriors, back off: This guy's got the goods.

During gameplay, type XYZZY to enable the cheats. Now try some of these butt-wuppin', ultraviolent, stain-the-streets-style codes:

YES,OCCIFER: Kill cop.
BRIBE: Kill cop.
SPOON!: Nitro.
THWACK!: Get chain.
K'THUNK!: Get club.
PLUGH: Disable cheats.



M.A.X.

You're a genetically bred super-commander with complete control over your army's technological might. So how come you keep getting your butt kicked? Pop these cheats into your clip and watch the smoke settle.

Enter these codes during gameplay.

MAXSURVEY: Shows where all resources are located.

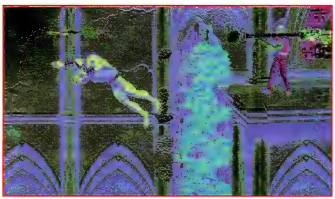
MAXSPY: Shows where all enemies are located.

MAXSUPER: Allows chosen unit to be upgraded to level 30.

MAXSTORAGE: Fills raw materials units' cargo completely.

MAXAMMO: Full load of ammo.

Note: If cheats don't work, try typing them in surrounded by brackets (e.g., **[MAXAMMO]***).*



Hunter Hunted

Man or beast, you're the deadliest game in town...

At any time during a game, type the following codes, followed by Enter:

COLE: All weapons, invincibility.

LUKASZUK: All weapons.

RAYL: Invincibility.

SNELLINGS: Restores health.

SAGE, BLUE, AVACADO, OCHRE, VINCENT, HAHN: Change player color.

Alien Trilogy

"Game over, man. Game over." Yeah, right.

Type these cheats during gameplay:

COMEANDHAVEAGO: Get all weapons.

IFYOUTHINKYOUAREHARD ENOUGH: Unlimited ammo for all weapons.

NADIAPOPOVxx (where "xx" is level 1–34): Level warp.

At the Options screen, go to Password and type these level codes:

TQBBBBBB13BB94B2 KLB TLBLMBZJG9BBB: Level 211.

YQBJVBBBF7BB94BB QVBLN BBMB7QK9BBB: Level 311.

Killing Time

Talk about mix-and-match. A little 8X damage, a little invisibility, a little genocide...we like it!

From the main menu, create a character with the name .EVORGRAH. The sound of a harp confirms you're in cheat mode. In the blank name window, type the following codes to advance to that section of the game with a pistol already in your inventory. Before each code, type two periods (e.g., ..W1).

W1: Experience.

AT: Attic Intro.

A5: Bloodclock.

E1: Circus Mortus.

U2: Bonus Blast.

U3: Clean Your Clock.

E2: Columns of Seth.

SW: Dankmosphere.

A3: Darkling Attic.

GH: Great Hall.

W4: Elevator Shoes.

WS: Hopscotch.

A2: Losing.

WW: Switches.

VW: Shade.

S2: Necropolis.

H3: Old Foundation.

C1: Outer Patio.

W2: Hieroglyphics.

W4: Room Service.

LG: Kes' Lounge.

TR: Tess' Room.

A6: Time to Die.

H2: Garden.

UH: Upper Hall.

L1: Hard Cover.

S3: Ball.

H1: Hedge.

Each of these location codes can be combined with the following letters and numbers to give you various inventory items (e.g., ..W1123ACE); you can enter a max. of 13 letters/numbers after a given location.

0–9: Each number gives you a different gem.

A: 8X damage.

B: Invulnerability.

C: 200 percent health.

D: Double pistol.

E: Map hazards.

F: Flamethrower.

H: Automap.

L: Invisibility.

M: Map secrets.

N: Map loot.

R: Genocide bomb.

S: Shotgun.

Y: Unlimited ammo.

Scorched Planet

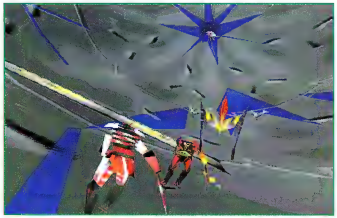
This game may be about protecting innocent lives, but you know what they say about the best defense…

Enter these codes during gameplay:

ALIAH: Toggles Invulnerability.
FATAL: All weapons and ammo.

Level-skipping codes:

LAVA2: Mission 1, stage 2
LAVA3: Mission 1, stage 3
GATE1: Mission 2, stage 1
GATE2: Mission 2, stage 2
GATE3: Mission 2 stage 3
CROC1: Mission 3, stage 1
CROC2: Mission 3, stage 2
CROC3: Mission 3, stage 3
HEAT1: Mission 4, stage 1
HEAT2: Mission 4, stage 2
HEAT3: Mission 4, stage 3



HyperBlade

Losers play fair; winners play dirty. So when you're having trouble putting the Rok in the goal, call on these cheats to swing a little momentum in your favor. Just don't let the commissioner find out…

Type these cheats during gameplay:

MDMKSB: Increases attack ability, makes you more immune to attack.
SPICYBRAINS: Gives you up-side-down characters.
POTATO: Reduces character size.
SHUIN: Enables a hidden team.
GORILLA: Gorilla characters.

Tom Clancy SSN

Technology wins modern wars—and cheat-code technology is as powerful a weapon as any. Try these on your next war patrol and show the enemy some good old-fashioned Yankee know-how.

Type B to activate Comm panel. Type CISCO SEZ and Enter to enable cheats.

BE MY BUDDY: Makes targeted object your ally.
FLIP HER: Instant 180-degree turn.
ZEPPELIN: Allows sub to fly
ON YOUR BUTT: Teleports sub directly behind a targeted enemy.

Blood (shareware)

Can't fork your way out of this month's Blood demo? You can now…

Hit T during gameplay, and then type in the following codes:

NOCAPINMYASS: God mode.
CAPINMYASS: God mode off.
EVA GALLI: Clipping on/off.
GOONIES: Full map.
RATE: Displays frame rate.
IDAHO: All weapons and ammo.
BUNZ: All weapons and ammo.
LARA CROFT: All weapons, unlimited ammo.
HONGKONG: All weapons, unlimited ammo.
MONTANA: All weapons, ammo, and items.
KEYMASTER: All keys.
SATCHEL: All items.
SPORK: 200 health.
CLARICE: 100 health.
GRISWOLD: Full armor.
ONERING: Toggle invisibility.
CALGON: Level skip.
MCGEE: Set yourself on fire.
FORK BROUSSARD: No weapons, 1 health, drunk mode.
STERNO: Fade to black.
JOJO: Drunk mode.

Is a certain game driving you nuts? Can't figure out how to kill an enemy, solve a puzzle, or find a key? We can help! Send your cheat code requests to:
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e-mail: cohen@pcgames.com
Compiled by Corey Cohen and Daniel Morris

Pentium Pros: Ready for Game Time?

With the Pros dropping in price, they may soon be the 3D system of choice

By J.V. Bolkan

Once, it was relatively easy to assemble a dream game system—simply buy the beefiest CPU from Intel and outfit it with the best peripherals you could find. But because of the peculiarities of 32-bit and 64-bit architectures, it took a while before the 64-bit Pentium Pro was tweaked to make it competitive with standard 32-bit Pentiums in 2D and 3D gaming.

There's no doubt that the Pentium Pro processor is king when it comes to running dedicated 32-bit operating systems such as Windows NT, especially for high-end applications such as 3D modeling and rendering. But when it came to running DOS and 16-bit Windows applications, early Pentium Pro CPUs actually turned in slower results than regular Pentiums.

Stung by the publicity, Intel set about improving the 16-bit performance of the Pro chip without the normal hype that the company is famous for, making this the perfect time to take a look at how Pentium Pros match up against regular Pentiums as game machines today.

Because a 166MHz Pentium is now the price-performance choice for most gamers on a budget and is what many players are using today, we used it as a baseline for comparison for two Pentium Pro systems—Intergraph's TD-200 and Census Computer System's 200MHz Pentium Pro–based systems. To isolate the performance of the base systems, we used the same 3D graphics card in all three systems—the Rendition Vérité–based Intergraph Intense 3D 100. All the systems were outfitted with EIDE hard drives and 32MB of RAM.

One of our first tests was simply to install what is fast becoming *PC Games*' benchmark suite of games. The good news is that all of them ran right the first time on all three systems. Among the games we tested were HyperBlade, MechWarrior 2: Mercenaries, Command & Conquer: Red Alert, Duke Nukem 3D, and Quake (in both the standard version and the Vérité-ready version). We also tested the graphics performance of all three machines using a variety of 2D and 3D benchmarking programs.

Intergraph's TD-200 costs just a little more than high-end 200MHz Pentiums.

In general, the P166 system more than held its own in most 2D tests and benchmarks when running standard versions of Mercenaries and Red Alert. The Pentium scores were between 12 percent and 17 percent lower than the Pro scores, about the same as the clock speed differential. It would seem safe to assume that a 200MHz Pentium would have performed approximately on a par with the Pros. However, in the more CPU-intensive 3D tests, the Pentium simply couldn't compete. At best, it came within 25 percent of the Pros, and at worst, the Pros ran a screaming 250 percent faster. To maximize graphics performance of the Pentium Pro systems, we ran John Hinkley's FastVid, a shareware utility that's recommended by id for use with Pentium Pro systems running Quake. It has no effect on Pentium graphics performance.

It's important to note that for many of the games we looked at, performance was excellent on even the slowest system in this group. Games such as C&C: Red Alert, HyperBlade, and MechWarrior 2: Mercenaries are designed to perform well on systems well below the standards we set for this article, and a good 3D graphics card and a reasonably fast Pentium are still adequate for most games. Of course, for the speed and performance fanatic, too fast is never fast enough.

Before getting into specifics of the testing, it's interesting to examine the performance of the common graphics adapter we used. The Intense 3D 100 with 4MB of RAM (formerly called the Reactor) is a solid performer for 2D games, but truly shines when running Direct3D games. A Vérité-enabled version of Quake (VQuake) delivers some surprising results when compared to the standard version: At low resolutions (320-by-200), VQuake actually doubled the frame rate of Quake on the Intergraph computer, nearly doubled it on the Census, and delivered nearly half again as many frames on the P166.

As resolution increases, the performance gains of VQuake diminish. At 640-by-480, the Intergraph frame rate for VQuake is 29.7 and the Quake rate is 24.7; on the P166, the rates are 11.0 and 10.7; and on the Census system, VQuake is actually slower than Quake, with rates of 15.1 and 21.7. At even higher resolutions, all the systems run VQuake slower than regular Quake.

The reason for the strange results is actually quite simple. Rather than simply boosting speed, VQuake adds extremely detailed textures. Even at the lowest resolutions. VQuake's enhanced textures are superior to Quake's high resolution modes. At mid-level resolutions, the differences are incredible and the frame rate remains quite acceptable. With the highest available resolution available for VQuake and the Intense 3D 100 (768-by-576), the textures are almost too realistic, and the frame rates on all but the Intergraph system were too slow for gameplay.

Obviously, even with an advanced 3D graphics adapter, the CPU performance is critical. Both Pentium Pro systems were more than capable of playing Quake at satisfactory performance levels even with the enhanced texturing, while the Pentium was limited to lesser realism and jerky video.

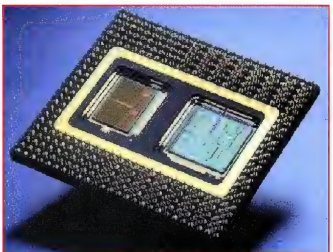
Although the Pros can make great game machines, computer-makers are still apprehensive about testing them as such, because most Pentium Pro systems are configured for CAD and graphics-rendering applications. Here's how our two test systems stack up.

Intergraph TD-200

Having built its reputation in the technical CAD and professional animation markets, Intergraph has recently begun targeting the consumer game market, first with its Intense 3D 100 3D accelerator card, and now with the TD-200 Pentium Pro system.

Intergraph is known for fine-tuning and balancing every aspect of its systems for maximum performance. With the TD-200, it's succeeded in creating a gaming platform that isn't likely to be surpassed until the arrival of Klamath-based systems or MMX-enabled Pentium Pro systems. In other words, if you want the fastest Intel-based 3D gaming platform money can buy, you can stop right here.

Speaking of money, that's the Achilles heel of the TD-200: Custom-designing a system that squeezes every ounce of performance from a Pentium Pro is expensive. The price of a fully outfitted TD-200 is $2,395 on the street. The configuration includes a 2GB hard disk, an Intense 3D 100 graphics card, 32MB of RAM, an 8X CD-ROM drive, an integrated sound system with powered speakers, and a mini-tower case with mouse, keyboard, and Windows 95.



The Pentium Pro has a huge footprint compared to regular Pentium chips.

As mentioned earlier, the TD-200 is an absolute screamer when crunching 3D graphics. Running VQuake with enhanced textures at 640-by-480 resolutions, the frame rate is just under 30—the standard for broadcast television rates.

Intergraph backs the TD-200 with an industrial-strength three-year warranty. The first year includes next-day, on-site service. The following two years include parts and round-trip shipping charges.

Census Pentium Pro 200

At the other end of the spectrum from Intergraph, Census offers a Pentium Pro system at a Pentium price. For less than $1,700, you get 32MB of RAM, a 1GB hard disk, an 8X CD-ROM drive, a Creative Labs SoundBlaster sound system, and an Intense 3D card. As you can see, the system is priced competitively with many name-brand Pentium systems.

Although not tweaked for ultimate performance like the Intergraph, the Census system still performs well above the best Pentium systems when running 3D games. In the Quake frame-rate test, the Census consistently beat the 166MHz Pentium by more than 50 percent; at 640-by-480 resolution, the results were more than twice as fast. For straight 2D speed, the Census is a match for the Intergraph system and about 15 percent better than the Pentium.

Census is very representative of the hordes of lesser-known system vendors who offer no-frills performance at cut-rate prices. If you're looking at getting into a power-Quake gaming platform, you really should take a look at Pentium Pro systems from vendors such as Census.

End Game

Pentium Pro systems have certainly overcome any performance problems they may have once had when running in DOS or Windows 95. And, although the best systems are still a little pricey, the Pentium Pro is quickly becoming very competitive in the complex price-vs.-performance equation.

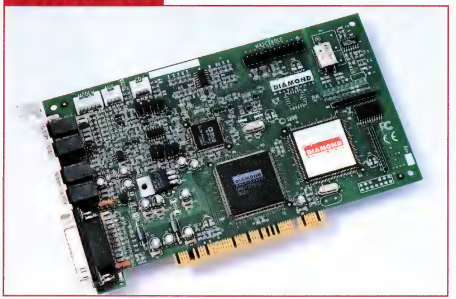
Right now, all the hype and marketing energy are being directed at the new MMX Pentium systems. But if you really want to fly through your 3D games, consider what the professionals use—a Pentium Pro.

Intergraph TD-200/Intergraph Intense 3D 100
Intergraph Computer Systems
800-763-0242
www.intergraph.com/ics
List Price: TD-200 (as configured), $2,820
Intense 3D 100, $169

Census PP200
Census Computer Inc.
818-839-2838
www.censuscomputer.com
List Price (as configured, without graphics card): $1,530

3D Audio: The Vapor Begins to Dissipate

Diamond's Monster Sound card is the first true 3D audio card.



For several years now, sound-card makers have been slapping the word "3D" on the box. They know that anything with the phrase "3D" on it will get your attention. Unfortunately, what they have delivered has little to do with what most people expect from 3D audio. Most of the sound technology pitched as 3D has really been little more than "stereo enhancement"—various techniques that trick your ears into perceiving a wider sound "image" than the one actually delivered by your two PC speakers.

Sound cards such as Creative's AWE64 use spatialization, and are great at enhancing the depth of stereo sound. Configure your speakers just so, and they can add to the perceived range of what you think you're hearing. But as much as we like them, these cards don't really offer true 3D. Although there are true 3D chipsets in the works, if you see sound cards today mentioning hardware based on Q-Sound, Crystal or Spatializer algorithms, these products will pump out spatialized sound, not 3D audio.

Spatialization is a nice feature, but it isn't what gamers want from 3D audio. Gamers want audio that moves all the way around them and reacts to gameplay. When a car zooms up from behind, you want to hear it approach—from behind—before you see it onscreen. As it passes, you want your ears to hear it pass on your left or right, with the sound zooming off into the distance ahead of you as you frantically shoot missiles at the competitor. That's 3D audio.

The good news is that true 3D audio is finally around the corner…and we can hear it coming.

It's All in the Hardware

The reason that 3D audio has been so long in coming is that it is a real engineering job to trick your ears into believing that you're in a "sphere" of audio information, especially using just a couple of speakers. The answer, as always in the PC arena, is faster hardware and software algorithms that let your PC "color" the sounds with "positional cues." These sound cues are distortions in sound waves that our brain uses to figure out whether the sound of that growling wolf is coming from ahead of us or behind us. By applying these different sound cues to sounds like car engines and explosions in real time, numerous game designs will suddenly step forward into the realm of true 3D audio. Sound-card designers like to call it "positional 3D audio."

Microsoft's Gambit

The near-term solution for 3D positional audio is Microsoft's DirectSound3D, which appeared in DirectX 3.0, Microsoft's latest version of its game-programming tools. On the plus side of things, DirectSound3D makes it relatively easy for game programmers to add 3D position information to their audio. However, the main problem with the current version of DirectSound3D is that it's entirely software-based. Furthermore, for DirectX 3.0, Microsoft refused to optionally pass along the positional information to a hardware-based accelerator like it does with all of the other DirectX APIs. This means that even if you get a sound card with true 3D sound hardware acceleration, DirectX 3.0 won't support it. The big no-surprise rumor behind this weird reluctance on Microsoft's part was that the company secretly has its own audio hardware in the works and wants to be able to keep 3D hardware acceleration proprietary. (If Microsoft launches sound hardware in the next 12 months, we'll know it's probably pretty good!)

Luckily, Microsoft has reconsidered. The DirectX 5.0 version of DirectSound3D (Microsoft is skipping releasing a DirectX 4.0), due out in the fall, will support any hardware for which vendors care to write a driver. This means that next year we will see the same kind of flood of 3D sound titles taking advantage of DirectX-compatible hardware that we're seeing today in 3D graphics accelerators. Of course, when there's lots of competition around a common standard, we gamers win with lower prices and bodacious features. DirectX 5.0 may even hardware-accelerate DirectSound3D titles written for DirectX 3.0. That means many of your "older titles" from early '97 will suddenly have hardware-accelerated 3D audio by the end of the year.

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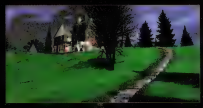

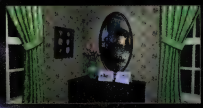

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–Next Generation Magazine

"All in all, the Canopus Total3D card is THE best 3D card that I have seen. The difference it made in game play was striking. When I have to play a non 3D enhanced game, it will be disappointing."
–Win95 Magazine

"The Rendition Verite is the current reigning king of combination 2D/3D chips, and the Canopus Total3D is the reigning king among Rendition Verite-based cards."
Total3D: 9 out of 10 Stars. Kick Ass! awards
–boot Magazine

"The Top Rated 2-D/3-D combo card, the Canopus Total3D, scored a 90 [out of 100] for its combination of excellent 3-D performance, above-average 2-D performance, and extra features."
–FamilyPC Magazine

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What's the Gear?

The first multi-channel product for the PC games aficionado is Diamond's Monster Sound ($199), one of the first of a new generation of PCI-based sound cards. The Monster Sound is a DSP-driven board that can take the burden of "streaming" multiple channels of audio (up to 24) off your processor; more importantly, it has the hardware to color your sounds with 3D audio cues in real time. Diamond promises the board will support DirectSound and DirectSound3D, and since it's DSP-based, it should be readily upgradable in the future.

What is really exciting about the Monster Sound is the "quad channel" output. You guessed it—Monster Sound lets you hook four speakers to your PC; two go behind you and the other two in front of you. Suddenly, your PC starts looking a lot more like a home-theater setup. The trick for many will be finding a place in their den or office to put those rear speakers, but we expect many hardcore gamers to find a way. If you don't have a four-speaker setup, you'll be able to configure Monster Sound to render the 3D sound information using two speakers. It won't be as convincing, but it will likely be more immersive than most stereo-enhancement techniques.

While often overlooked in the PC arena, headphones may make a comeback as 3D audio becomes more popular. In many cases, the greatest utility of positional audio in games isn't for representing onscreen action, but off-screen action—the stuff going on to your right and left, and above and behind you. While multi-speaker setups can handle getting audio behind you without a problem, headphones remain the best way to convey elevation (above/below) information, and they can do a very convincing job of depicting sounds coming from behind you. Furthermore, a good pair of headphones will probably cost less and take less time to set up than multi-speaker configurations. The downside with headphones is that they sometimes can't render sounds directly in front of you as well as a pair of speakers.

3D Audio is hear—er, here. After Diamond's Monster Sound, we can expect an avalanche of 3D sound-enabled products. As DVD arrives, with its multi-channel Dolby Surround support, the notion of more than two speakers attached to a PC may not seem so crazy. Your next big PC audio decision may be whether to go with a multi-speaker setup or to try headphones. Regardless, by the holidays, the sound scene on the PC is going to be lot more deep. We can't wait.

—David Gerding

Apocalypse 3D

The Apocalypse 3D is the product of a partnership between VideoLogic and NEC.

RATING: B+

VideoLogic's Apocalypse 3D accelerator isn't for the faint-of-heart 3D gamer. With extremely high frame rates, realistic shadows, lighting effects, and a 32-bit Z-buffer, even an average game can become totally immersing. An intense racer or shoot-'em-up with this card under the hood just might be too much excitement for some people.

The Apocalypse also isn't suited for anyone nursing older, under-powered systems. You'll need at least a 133MHz Pentium with plenty of RAM and a good 2D graphics adapter, because the Apocalypse is dedicated to 3D. Powering the card is NEC's PowerVR-based PCX1 processor and 4MB of SDRAM for texture memory. Although the requirements are steep, the street price for the Apocalypse is reasonable, at about $189.

MechWarrior 2 is one of the games bundled with the Apocalypse 3D.

If you have a suitable platform, you probably already have a good graphics card such as the Matrox Millennium, a Number Nine Imagine 128, or something comparable. Apocalypse is designed to work with your existing graphics card without harming 2D performance.

The card has no connectors and simply needs to be plugged into a PCI slot. Installation is as simple as hardware can get. A quick check of my system by a utility on the Apocalypse CD assured me that my existing graphics card was compatible. Windows recognized the card and prompted for the drivers, which ran off the CD without a hitch. Within five minutes of installation, I was up and running.

Unfortunately, there are only two games bundled with Apocalypse. The PowerVR version of Activision's MechWarrior 2 is stunning—the explosions still can't match those on the 3Dfx version, though. The second game, Kalisto's Ultimate Race, has been built from the ground up to run on the Apocalypse card. The game takes excellent advantage of the 4MB of dedicated texture-mapping RAM and the special-effects capabilities of the hardware. One thing you'll notice right off, however, is that PowerVR does not perform antialiasing, which smoothes pixels as you get close to them. Thus, you won't see smooth walls as you do with the Rendition and 3Dfx boards in Quake and Tomb Raider, respectively. Future PowerVR chips will provide this feature, but the current chip's frame-rate performance is an acceptable tradeoff.

The Apocalypse doesn't rely on RAM for the Z-buffer as most other 3D cards do. Instead, all depth calculations are handled directly by the card's PCX1 processor. The result is extremely smooth animations. Even when your car is hurtling at fantastic speeds in Ultimate Race, the details on the horizon advance realistically.

Fortunately, NEC and VideoLogic have teamed with Microsoft to produce Direct3D drivers for the PowerVR architecture that take advantage of the Apocalypse's features. This means that even if NEC and VideoLogic are unsuccessful at convincing game developers to support the native PowerSGL drivers, there will still be plenty of 3D games available for the Apocalypse. (VideoLogic; 800-578-5644; www.videologic.com; $189) *—J. V. Bolkan*

The Sound Gods Are Finally Appeased

Features editor Don St. John encounters audio ecstasy on assignment

I'm tired of competing with everyone else in the office. I want to be the God of Sound here. I want them to tell *me* to shut *my* door. I want to revel loudly in every kill, every explosion, even the occasional Beatles CD...and I have a plan.

It uses several components—the main underpinning is the new, amazing Creative Labs Sound Blaster AWE64 Gold sound card, which takes the Blaster standard to new highs. It's no accident that it's *PC Games*' Required Gear this month (page 144): it's quiet, it's fairly simple to install once you realize you have to run the full install off the included CD-ROM to get all the right drivers, and it handles 64 simultaneous MIDI sounds—double the previous number—more sweetly than you'd ever dreamed possible. MIDI-based games will become a stunning treat with this baby.

But there are two truly clutch features. The stereo outputs are RCA jacks rather than the typical mini-plug jacks. Did someone say "stereo receiver"? Yes, the AWE64 Gold is now a snap to hook up to your receiver's auxiliary port. Imagine Quake blasting through your regular speakers with Redbook audio, and you'll start to get a total feel for the potential here. (Stereo components amplify the card's inherent noise more than standard desktop speakers, but it's a small price to pay.) On top of that, the 3D positional audio support is superb even with a single pair of normal speakers. With some surround-sound speakers or a full surround-sound setup, the immersive feel is outstanding.

The AWE64 practically demands that you take speakers into account. Remembering the old maxim about how no sound system is any better than its speakers, I decided to put a few sets through their paces. I could have stopped with Altec Lansing's ACS55 Power Gaming Speaker System: At only 12 watts per speaker and 50 watts for the subwoofer, it offers stunning power and crispness.

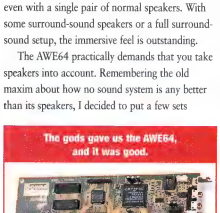
Most of the cleanness of the sound is attributable to the Dolby Multimedia Surround system in the speakers, which sends sound output to five channels—a subwoofer, two standard front-side speakers, and two side speakers that direct sound "around" the sides. The surround effect is startling: Not only does Duke's opening aircraft whoosh from side to side, but it fades away diagonally as well. This Altec package also includes the WaveCUBE 4.0 wavetable software driver, which lets you select and position 16 MIDI channels—quite useful for messing with any game's MIDI files. In all, this set is a gamer's dream.

Altec's ACS45 PowerCube Speaker System, while not nearly the equal of its better cousin, is a decent backup at $99. You won't get the surround or the full features of the ACS55; rather, this is a basic package that includes two small, square 6-watt speakers and a 20-watt subwoofer that isn't really enough to have any strong bass definition. Still, if you're looking to save a few bucks and want a small footprint, these are more than adequate.

For a second set of speakers, I went instead with the MidiLand Capriccio three-piece, a nicely balanced set at 20 watts for the speakers and 35 watts for the subwoofers. These also carry both game and music sound crisply, and the sub overcomes the muddiness inherent in so many bass boxes. On top of that, MidiLand provides fiber-optic cabling between the speakers and sub, ensuring virtually no signal degradation. It's hard to beat the 3D spatialization in the Altec ACS55s, and the Capriccios ring up at $249, $50 more than the Altecs—that's about one less game you can buy. But these are serious speakers that'll guarantee listening pleasure whatever the medium.

Thing is, why would I need so many speakers? You see, I also checked out miro Computer Products' miroMEDIA Surround card, which works in tandem with your existing sound card to provide a Dolby Pro Logic five-channel surround option. Like the AWE64, this is an ISA plug-and-play card that's pretty simple to set up, and connecting to the AWE64 requires only one simple mini-jack connection. The drawback here is the relative lack of Dolby surround–encoded games (or material of any sort, for that matter): miro bundles a Wing Commander IV demo, and Descent II and The Darkening are among the few other games that'll take advantage of five-channel playback.

Rather, the practical effect of the miroMEDIA Surround is three-channel playback using the DolbyPro 3 setup, which gives you a back center speaker, as well as the ability to use the surround control panel it installs to cycle through a number of spatialized sound options. Still pretty cool, and this card will realize its full potential with the release of more Dolby Surround–encoded titles and—more to the point—the many more DVD titles likely to feature surround. If you want to pop for the $99 now, it's better to think of it as an investment in the future. —*Don St. John*



The miroMEDIA surround-sound card makes setting up extended speaker systems easier.

ACS55 Power Gaming Speaker System/ ACS45 PowerCube Speaker System
Altec Lansing
800-258-3288
www.alteclansing.com
List Price: $199/$99
Rating: A/B

Sound Blaster AWE64 Gold
Creative Labs
408-428-6600
www.creativelabs.com
List Price: $249
Rating: A

Capriccio
MidiLand
909-592-1168
www.midi-land.com
List Price: $249
Rating: A-

miroMEDIA Surround
miro Computer Products
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Rating: B+

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MMX Overdrive Processor

RATING: B

So you bought a P100 a year ago, and now you're kicking yourself because everyone is talking about MMX and you don't have it? You say you want to do something about it, but you really like your current system?

You could go out and buy a 200MHz MMX processor for $655 on the street, or pay $425 for a 166MHz MMX chip—if your motherboard is new enough to handle processors that speedy. If your motherboard doesn't fit into this category, Intel has an MMX for you in the form of a Pentium Overdrive processor. Unlike earlier days when the first Pentium Overdrives intended for 486 boards couldn't be found, Intel was serious enough about its MMX product to have plenty of them on store shelves in March when the chips were released.

There are two specific MMX Overdrive options: a $499 model that raises motherboards set at 100MHz to 166MHz with MMX, and a $399 model that will take 75MHz-set motherboards to 125MHz with MMX and 90MHz-set motherboards to 150MHz with MMX.

I won't get into the argument here about whether anyone "needs" MMX technology in 1997; this review assumes you've already made that decision. But don't go the Overdrive route if your motherboard can handle 200MHz speeds—go with the straight MMX processor. There isn't a 200MHz MMX Overdrive available yet, and the standard 166MHz MMX chip is about $60 cheaper than the 166MHz MMX Overdrive. For those of you with the older motherboards, the Pentium Overdrive MMX is a better deal, especially if you can live with 150MHz instead of 166MHz.

Intel understands that most Pentium owners are not techno-savvy creatures who feel comfortable cracking open their system cases. That's why it's marketing the MMX overdrives in 75MHz, 90MHz, and 100MHz cases—it's painlessly easy to open a computer case, remove the existing processor from its insertion socket, and throw in the MMX Overdrive. But for gamers who are not afraid of switching jumper settings on the motherboard, there are a lot more overdrive options available.

Say you have a 100MHz Pentium now, but don't want to pay more than $400 for MMX. You could reset the jumpers on your motherboard to 90MHz and buy the 90MHz-to-150MHz MMX Overdrive chip. The same goes if you have a P75: just set the jumpers to 90MHz and you can fly at 150MHz. In these scenarios, the MMX Overdrive is a viable option for updating your system today.

The MMX Overdrive that Intel sent *PC Games* was the 100MHz-to-166MHz model. What comes with the chip, which includes a hard-wired cooling fan on top, is documentation and a 1.44 disk that has diagnostic utilities and some Win 95 upgrades. It is important to run the diagnostic first before inserting the overdrive processor. The one drawback to these chips is that the system BIOS must date from June of last year or later. If not, the diagnostic utility will alert you, and you'll have to upgrade the BIOS.

Unfortunately, there are going to be a lot of people whose system BIOS doesn't pass muster. In my case, the P133 selected to test the MMX Overdrive, even though it was purchased last September, had a BIOS that dated to the previous April. Despite the fact that this board used flash BIOS for easy software updates, when we contacted the motherboard-maker, they told us they hadn't done a BIOS upgrade, and wouldn't say when they would. If Intel is smart, it'll make the diagnostic utility available for download from its Web site so prospective buyers can check first before purchasing the MMX Overdrive. Regardless, watch your monitor carefully at boot; in many cases, the revision date of the BIOS will appear while the system is checking memory.

Switching to a newer motherboard solved the BIOS problem, and the MMX Overdrive was installed and running within the 10 minutes it took to pop open the case, insert the new chip, and close everything up. As promised in the literature, the computer ran at 166MHz. Besides being able to run MMX-optimized games such as Pod, the upgraded Pentium exhibited the kinds of speed gains expected when going from 133MHz to 166MHz.

The Pentium MMX Overdrive would have rated higher if it had exhibited a friendlier attitude to the older system BIOS. If you can easily upgrade the BIOS in your system and want MMX, then these overdrive chips are worth considering. But being restricted to newer motherboards and messing with system BIOS upgrades negates the easy backward-compatibility concept of the MMX Overdrive. (Intel; 800-538-3373; www.mmx.com; list price $499 for 100MHz-to-166MHz, $399 for 75MHz-to-125MHz/90MHz-to-150MHz) —*George T. Chronis*

RATING: A-

EA Sports GrIP

Not a new product exactly, but a refurbished classic. What Gravis has done is to reissue the GrIP at $99.95 with the EA Sports logo emblazoned all over it, in stark white (vs. the old gray), and bundle it with Triple Play '97. The actual GrIP system—the deck and the two gamepads that come with it—is identical to the one we know and love. The deck provides four-player support with the GrIP's eight-button pads, all at a single machine. If you're a PC sports gamer who doesn't own the GrIP system, run right out and buy it now.

Of course, there is a profound irony in EA Sports championing the GrIP system, given the fact that some EA Sports titles only support two buttons. In fact, the game I've gotten the most fun out of with my new EA Sports GrIP is Virgin's NHL Powerplay '96—with eight-button support, natch.

Oh, well. Gravis makes a damn fine product. The GrIP installs with software in about three minutes flat, and then you're off and running. In this Wired Age of Internet play, there's still nothing as exciting or invigorating as playing head-to-head against a buddy at the same console. The GrIP has been one of our favorites since its first appearance, and we think it'll be one for a while to come. (Advanced Gravis; 800-663-8558; www.gravis.com; street price $99.95) —*Daniel Morris*

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TECHNOBABBLE

Out with klunky drivers, in with better sound

By David Gerding

Kludge Alert

A Love/Hate Thing

Lately we've been playing around with a combination of Thrustmaster's F-22 stick and the F-16 TQS. The F-22 is Thrustmaster's top-of-the-line programmable stick, and the TQS is its amazing throttle control. These sticks have more hat switches than a Las Vegas stage show, and the TQS even has one of those rubber-nub mouse controllers so your hands never have to leave the controls. Very cool.

The problem? In a nutshell, Thrustmaster needs new control software across the board. It needs it now. Big time.

Problem No. 1: The software is DOS-based with a mostly character interface. As Windows gaming ascends to supremacy, there is little excuse for an interface that would have been at home on a PC circa 1987. This is a gaming product—can't things look a little less utilitarian? Although there are Windows 95 joystick drivers, programming the sticks still requires mucking around in a butt-ugly DOS screen. Examples of aesthetically pleasing control utilities are those in Microsoft's SideWinder Gamepad and Advanced Gravis' Firebird.

Problem No. 2: The software requires programming aptitude to customize scripts. Again, this is an interface problem. For those who just want pre-configured scripts for the most popular games, Thrustmaster doesn't leave you hanging: Downloading a new patch into a stick is relatively painless. But the beauty of a programmable control is the *programmability*. Thrustmaster offers an incredibly complicated programming language to achieve this end. Who has time to wade through the manual and learn all that stuff? Even in the world of "real" programming, trivial tasks are increasingly taken care of using *visual* programming. If you want to program the way a button on a stick behaves, you should be able to just click on a picture of the button on a screen and have a wizard walk you through all the options available for that button—voila!

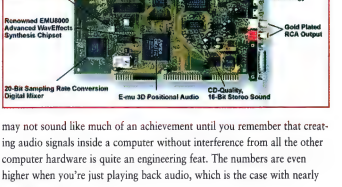
Please, Thrustmaster, whatever your programmers are telling you, ignore them. Controls as excellent as yours deserve software at least as good as the hardware. When USB arrives, it's likely that *everyone's* sticks will be programmable. The ones that are easy to program will have an edge.

Required Gear

Sound Blaster AWE64 Gold

Creative has been the king of the hill in PC audio for some time now. While there are PCI- and USB-based technologies coming from Creative and its competitors that will shake up the somewhat dull sound-card scene, those technologies step just far enough ahead in the computer curve that they are likely to be incompatible with many existing DOS and DOS-under-Windows titles…which brings us to the AWE64 Gold. Coming as it does just before a wave of new technologies, the AWE64 Gold is likely to be the high-water mark in ISA-based sound-card technology. More importantly for those of you with a large active library of DOS-based titles, it's going to run all of your games.

The most immediate thing that discerning listeners will notice once they've installed the AWE64 is what they don't hear. The AWE64 has a signal-to-noise ratio of around 80db and a total harmonic distortion of .012% during record and playback, which is better than any other Creative gear to date. It approaches what you get on some lower-end home-stereo gear. That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may not sound like much of an achievement until you remember that creating audio signals inside a computer without interference from all the other computer hardware is quite an engineering feat. The numbers are even higher when you're just playing back audio, which is the case with nearly every game.

The main technical differences compared to the old AWE32, besides improved sound quality, come in the MIDI implementation. The AWE64 has 4MB of RAM for "SoundFonts," which puts it on par with Yamaha's excellent MIDI-GX products for the PC. For PC-based musicians, the MIDI memory is expandable up to 28MB. Though more and more games are going with canned music tracks streamed off of the CD, we think MIDI is the way to go with game music because it's the best way to keep it interactive. Unlike music tracks stored on CD, MIDI music can be seamlessly dynamic to match onscreen developments.

Until Windows-based games dominate the best-seller charts, the AWE64 is as good as it gets for *PC Games* power-users. (Creative Labs; 800-998-5227; www.creativelabs.com; street price $250)

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TECHNOBABBLE S.O.S.

TIE Fighter turmoil and the skinny on Cyrix chips

By Patrick Marshall

Q I've had Windows 95 since it came out in August. Ever since then, I've been trying to get two games to run under this OS, but I keep having to run them under a boot disk. I was under the assumption that Win 95 did away with all that. I have a 486DX4/133 with 8MB of RAM, and I still, to this day, cannot get TIE Fighter or X-Wing to work under Windows 95. Please help.

Jonathan Petruska
Via the Internet

A *The culprit isn't Windows; it's the way older DOS applications—especially games—access memory. Games such as TIE Fighter and X-Wing require a lot of RAM, and they were designed to access memory beyond the base 640K of system memory—memory that has been configured according to the older "expanded memory" specification. You could, in principle, configure the required amount of RAM as expanded memory before loading Windows 95, but since Windows 95 uses its own more efficient memory-management scheme, you'd be compromising the performance of Windows. That's why LucasArts recommends that you use either a boot disk or create a Windows 95 shortcut that accomplishes the same purpose. Here's how to set up a Windows 95 shortcut for X-Wing:*

1. Double-click on the My Computer icon on the desktop. Then find the folder where you installed X-Wing and locate the Xwinged icon. Drag the icon to the desktop. Windows will automatically create an icon labeled "Shortcut to Xwinged."

2. Right-click on the shortcut icon and choose the Properties option. Select the Program tab from the dialog box that pops up. Next, click on the Advanced button, and then on the "Suggest MS-DOS mode as necessary" box.

3. Now you need to set up the expanded memory manager. Under the Config.sys section, enter these three lines:

DEVICE=C:\WINDOWS\HIMEM.SYS
DEVICE=C:\WINDOWS\EMM386.EXE 2560 RAM D=256
DOS=HIGH,UMB

4. The above, of course, assumes that you've set up Windows on the C: drive. If not, substitute the appropriate letter. You'll also need to add the appropriate lines for loading DOS drivers for your CD-ROM and sound card.

5. Finally, go to the Autoexec.bat section and enter the command that invokes MSCDEX. You'll want to copy that command as it appears in your original Autoexec.bat file, minus the "REM by Windows 95 Setup" comment. The line will look something like this:

C:\WINDOWS\COMMAND\MSCDEX.EXE /D:XX

Now you're all set. Exit the dialog boxes and give the shortcut a try.

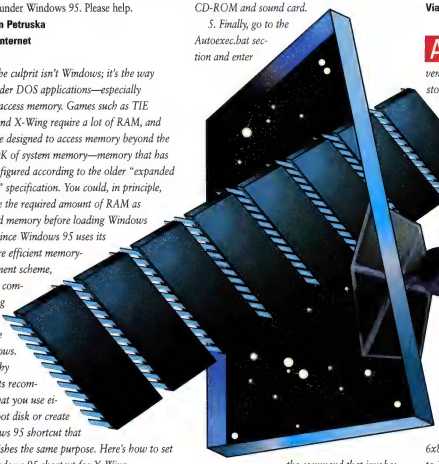

ILLUSTRATION BY STEVEN W. FLEURY

Q I've finally set aside the money to get a new system. Unfortunately, I keep forgetting to enter the correct state-lottery numbers when it really counts, so value is a major concern here.

I've read about the Cyrix chips and their impressive performance and how much you get for the price. And the Cyrix ads claim that the Cyrix chip will best any comparable Intel chip, citing tests like "Winstone" to back their claim. But when I've mentioned the technology to some "experts" I know, they've either recoiled, or made faces when the Cyrix name was brought up. I've been told not to bother with anything but Intel. Any thoughts?

Dave
Via the Internet

A *Lies, damned lies and benchmarks. No, the benchmarks aren't actually lies, but most vendors can find one or another to back their story. There was even a case a few years back where several graphics-board makers were caught tweaking their boards not to increase performance for users but to increase their scores on certain popular benchmarks. That said, the Cyrix 6x86 chips do have a record of keeping pace with, if not outpacing, Intel's chips. And the compatibility and reliability of the Cyrix chips are also high.*

So what chance are you taking by opting for a Cyrix chip? Well, it's a fact that software and hardware developers don't test with the Cyrix chips as extensively and thoroughly as they do with the Intel chips. As a result, you may occasionally run into some glitches or reduced performance. Some early versions of the 6x86 chips, for example, ran Windows NT 4.0 20 to 30 percent slower than the Intel Pentium. Of course, Intel's Pentium line has had several well-publicized glitches as well, including its famous floating-point error.

In short, any purchase is a gamble. If your budget's tight, I wouldn't shy away from giving the Cyrix chips a try.

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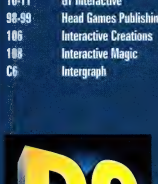

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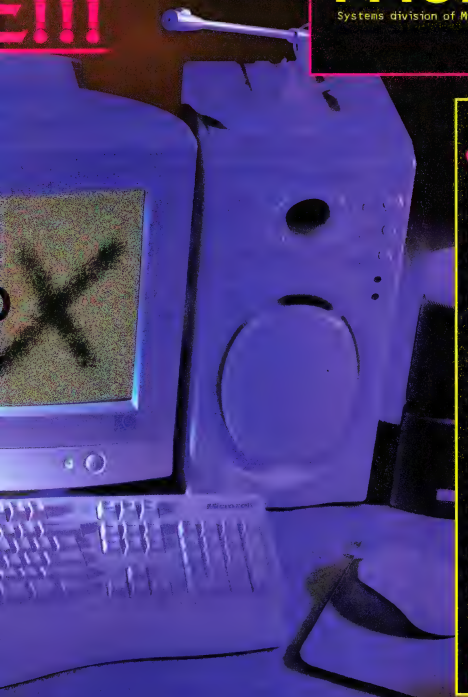

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FACE-OFF

Turok: Dinosaur Hunter vs. 3D Quake

Scary Larry | *Blade*

Ah, the age-old conflict between good and evil, light and dark, ignorance and enlightenment…computer games versus console games. Armed with their Silicon Graphics–enhanced Nintendo 64s, console champions claim the edge in graphics quality, ease of use, cost of ownership, and gameplay. Defenders of the PC find consoles an obsolete breed that has been overtaken by the likes of Pentium MMX machines, 3D-accelerated graphics, and better games. Acclaim's new Turok: Dinosaur Hunter and 3Dfx-enhanced Quake provide the perfect basis for this month's discussion. To be fair, *PC Games* invited *GamePro* magazine's Scary Larry to argue for the console position; our own Blade rose to join him in bombastic barbs. Scary Larry's bovine theology appears in garish **bold**, while Blade's rapier swipes are in chic *italics*.

Turok may look pretty, but how does it stomp?

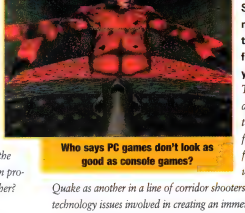
Turok versus 3D-accelerated Quake? Surely, you jest. You dare to compare a plug-and-play module against a night-marishly difficult-to-install, time-consuming, what's-your-dipswitch-setting fiasco like Quake? HA! Must we discuss the infinite joy of a fully loaded Fusion Cannon versus a pea-shooter that spits out nails? What's next? Quake: The Office Depot Edition, featuring a new Staple Gun? Quake is just another corridor shooter, and follows what engine? Doom's? Wolfenstein's? Quake is only slightly more original than Classic Coke.

Blasphemer! Comparing Quake's immersive and amazing-looking 3D engine to Wolfenstein's 2D, wall-door-wall level designs highlights the inability of the console game to produce truly involving settings. And weapons? The Super Nailgun is awesome—you can see every nail; it's the kind of detail progressive, nay, ground-breaking engines like Quake can produce. Have you seen the giblet spray from the effects of a rocket launcher? And how many players can you play against in Turok?

Ah, the old multiplayer argument…a poor one when you consider that most online deathmatches last about two seconds against experienced Quakers. If I wanted to chase people in real time down hallways and gun them into next week, I'd work for the Post Office. Did I hear you say that there are no truly involving settings in console games? No scare-me-till-I-need-a-pair-of-adult-diapers horror? I have to say that Turok's dino-slaying does wear thin after awhile, but usually only after you've been through a hellish real-life terror, like my ex-wife's divorce lawyers. And while we're on the subject of being bled dry, how much does a fully loaded version of Quake run you? Include in that price all mission builds, add-on CDs, graphic-accelerator cards, memory enhancements, and a high-end Pentium computer. Hmmm…do you hear that sound? It's the dust in your wallet congealing.

How do you get a deathmatch to last longer than two seconds? Practice. How do you practice? By pitting your skills against some of the thousands of people online, on the gaming services or on QuakeWorld. Endless options—and Quake provides the chance to waste a few innocent bystanders without repercussions from our fine judicial system. The game lasts forever—no throwing your latest state-of-the-art console system in the bin if companies don't support it…wasn't that your Jaguar I saw in the trash bin? PCs are always going to be supported. And if you want to be bled dry, sure, buy all the bells and whistles, but Quake runs fine on a decent Pentium and modem. Let's face it: This is the age of technology—PCs are adaptable to all sorts of things, not just game playing. But we're drifting from the games and the decent-game-starved console gamers who expect their purchases to last a few days before being consigned to "finished-game hell."

Ah, the lasting power of games…interesting point. But what use is it to a dedicated gamer for a game to last forever? Where is the sense of accomplishment, the sense of "got ya, ya filthy dinosaur bastards"? Quake may only seem endless to those who spend lots of time in the dark. And PCs are always going to be supported, you say? Tell that to the poor 286, single-speed CD-ROM, 4MB of RAM PC owners out there. While you're at it, convince Super NES owners (all 50 million of them worldwide) that their system wasn't faithfully supported for seven years. It was.

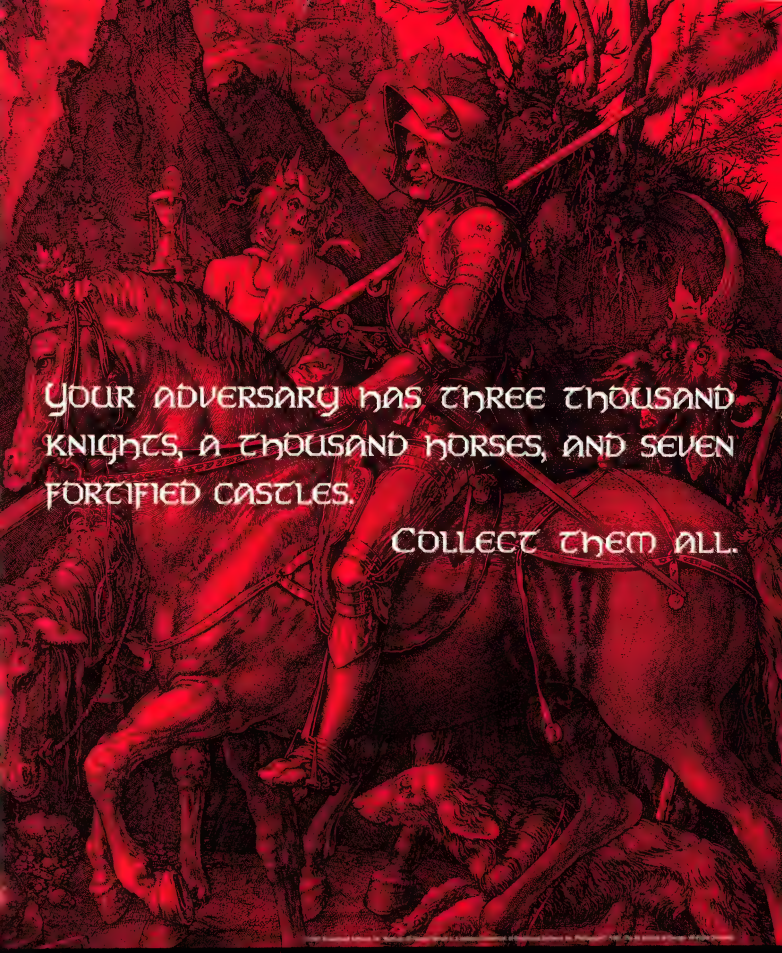


Who says PC games don't look as good as console games?

To address your first point, dedicated gamers are beginning to play games that do last forever—it's the final frontier, the future of games, online. Consoles won't ever get there. To dismiss Quake as another in a line of corridor shooters totally fails to appreciate the technology issues involved in creating an immersive 3D environment. The N64 has proven capable of such feats with the awesome Mario 64, and Turok has its merits, but how many years did it take to tweak these games so that they perform within the shadow of game PCs today? How many N64 games are going to get that level of commitment? Not many, I dare say. And you'll still be stuck paying $70 per cartridge for the games like Doom64 that don't measure up. Where's the value in that? So there!

Scary Larry is a legend in the video-game community, and not just for the size of his alimony payments. Some of his favorite pursuits these days include Turok, Doom64, and the SPICE Channel on cable.

Blade finds solace in such tactile endeavors as the latest Quake mod or the pure cathartic release of MDK. He would be happy to play N64 games if someone would donate a system to him.



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